

Turning a Dream of a Philippine Center into a Viable Reality (Part 2) - MabuhayRadio

Written by Bobby Reyes

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Yes, there are already "Philippine Centers" in New York and San Francisco (California). But both centers are housed in old modest buildings bought by the Philippine government during the Ferdinand E. Marcos presidency. There was also a Philippine Airlines (PAL) building in San Francisco but it was sold by Mr. Marcos' successor under scandalous circumstances. The Philippine Centers in New York and San Francisco were not built even with the assistance of Filipino architects and engineers. But their existence validates the concept of a one-stop shop for Filipino arts, business, culture, commerce, trade, tourism, aside from housing a Philippine diplomatic post.

On March 5, 2006, I drafted a proposal for a Filipino-Greek American consortium that was submitted to the Board of Directors of the Filipino-American Community of Los Angeles (FACLA). Here are the salient points in the proposal:

QUOTE.

This proposal is anchored on the fact that the FACLA is the first Filipino-American association recognized by the Federal government and, therefore, needs not a mere building but a show window of the positive contributions of Filipinos to the United States. Yes, the new FACLA building (AKA Philippine Center) should not just be a viable and self-amortizing edifice but it should be a repository of the colorful history of your people, a testament to the greatness of your leaders and a bold statement that the best is yet to come from the Filipinos in the United States.

The proposed Philippine Centers will avail of the best and brightest Filipino talents in architecture, engineering, interior design, finance and social services. In line with what we believe is the Board of Directors' orientation and vision, we believe that the project should not become a mixed-use development, which will combine commercial spaces with low-cost housing. The property is big enough only to become the "prestige address" of the Filipino-American community that will house not only ballroom and other meeting facilities such as showrooms or exhibit-festival areas but also offices. These rental spaces may house the Philippine Consulate General, the Philippine Tourism Office, a Philippine Trade Office, the Philippine Airlines, a Filipino bank or remittance company and condominium-type offices for certain Filipino-American associations that can join the FACLA in a strategic alliance to pursue the development project. The new FACLA building can be built to house also a modest library, a home for traveling museum exhibits from the Philippines and the beginning of a Filipino museum that will display not only the history of the FACLA but also that of the Filipinos in

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America.

Our company, which is a Filipino-Greek-American joint venture, is willing to lead in organizing a Los Angeles-based Filipino-American consortium that will avail of the best and brightest Filipino talents in architecture, engineering, interior design, finance and social services.

A Philippine Center is a repository of the colorful history of our people, a testament to the greatness of our leaders and a bold statement that the best is yet to come from the Filipinos in the United States.

We are including in this presentation our conceptual framework of approach of how to finance the construction of the proposed building, which we think should be built with Philippine marble, hardwood such as the Philippine “narra” panels and other unique Filipino items such as “kapiz” shells (for some of its windows). We are mentioning in it also a historical fact why the founding fathers of the FACLA did not envision the present location to become the site of affordable housing.

The process of achieving a viable development plan for the proposed new FACLA building will entail a long process. We are aware that not only do we need to complete a feasibility study and engineering studies but also an environmental-impact study and other requirements mandated by governmental regulations. But in line with that Chinese proverb that “a voyage begins with the first step,” we think that history will mark your decision of accepting our proposal as one of the defining moments of the Filipino-American community not only in Los Angeles but also in the entire United States.

Proposal to the FACLA Board of Directors

March 5, 2006

Conceptual Framework of Approach

1.0 WHY THE PRESENT LOCATION IS MEANT TO BECOME ONLY A “PRESTIGE ADDRESS” OF THE FILIPINO AMERICANS.

1.1 The earlier FACLA directors and executive officers acquired several apartment complexes that were rented to newly-arrived Filipino immigrants, so as to help them start on their road to acquiring their share of the American dream.

1.2 Unfortunately the good intentions of the FACLA founding fathers were dashed by the unconventional conduct of certain FACLA officers in the 1980s and as a result the said apartments were foreclosed by a lending institution in the early 1990s.

1.3 It may, therefore, be best to follow the intentions of the FACLA founding fathers and devote the present location to what it was meant to be. After all, the FACLA may acquire in the foreseeable future properties that can be sites of affordable housing, so as to help Filipino-American senior citizens and veterans find excellent shelter.

2.0 WAYS OF FINANCING THE NEW BUILDING.

2.1 The first option is for the FACLA itself to borrow from a lending institution the funds to develop the property and construct an ideal building. But this may prove to become difficult even with the guarantee of the present directors and officers – assuming that they are willing to become guarantors in their own personal capacity and their guarantees are acceptable to the bank. The FACLA may not have the necessary track record, income-wise, to proceed with this option.

2.2 The other option is for the FACLA to organize, with our assistance, a form of a “General Partnership” that may qualify it to become a sound borrower. The other “partners” of the FACLA have to contribute collectively an amount equal to the present market value of the property. The feature of this “property partnership” may be explained to you by a Realtor or real-estate broker or a lawyer, whose services may be required in organizing it.

3.0 SUGGESTED WAYS OF ENSURING LONG-TERM INCOME, SO AS TO MAKE THE PROJECT SELF-AMORTIZING.

3.1 As we proposed, lobby efforts must be made with the Philippine Government, so as to acquire a long-term (at least 20 years) of a rental (or rent-to-own) contract that will house in the new FACLA building the Philippine consulate, tourism and trade offices and other companies that have Philippine-government equity. These offices can be designed and built to suit the Philippine Government specifications, needs for security and other amenities. These long-term contracts will guarantee a steady source of rental income to meet the amortization schedule, as may be prescribed by the lending institution.

3.2 Long-term leases (or even rent-to-own contracts) may also be entered with interested Filipino-American companies such as a remittance company, a freight-forwarding firm and restaurant operators for a “food court.” Space willing, Filipino-American associations and professional offices such as a dental or medical clinic also may be housed, again on long-term basis. In short, we shall maximize every square foot. All of these contracts will further enhance the viability of the project insofar as the lending institution is concerned.

3.3 If the FACLA Board decides to devote the top two floors of the new building to house ballrooms or function rooms, the said facilities will never run out of clients, many of which may be asked to commit in form of contracts – even by giving advance deposits – to hold annual grand balls, conventions, alumni and/or clan reunions and wedding receptions.

3.3.1 The new FACLA building may have also a floor that can house the so-called “condotel,” or condominium units serving as hotel rooms or suites for the visiting dignitaries or community leaders gracing the events being held at the said ballrooms or functions rooms.

3.4 The proposed FACLA library and modest forerunner of a museum may be offered to mainstream corporations to subsidize by naming the facility or facilities after the sponsor. This “naming right” business is huge, as American corporations pay for the right to name a facility after them. The suggested ballrooms and functions rooms may also be named after corporate sponsors.

3.5 The community and Filipino-American associations, families and businesses may be

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asked to donate money to enlarge the development funds. In exchange for their donations, the donors' names may be etched on the marble slabs that may be used on the building's floors, walls, façade and gates. This practice has been done even at the new Queen of Angels Cathedral where the "naming right" for the marble floor near the altar was priced at \$5,000 per marble slab.

3.6 Our company, once awarded the contract to become the developer, will assist the FACLA in lobbying the Philippine Government, other concerned Philippine companies and prospective long-term tenants. We will fund a delegation to present concrete proposals to targeted tenants and suppliers in the Philippines and undertake the lobbying campaign with the appropriate Filipino-government agencies. We will start also a huge public-relations campaign to secure the support of the Filipino-American community, Filipino families and associations – on a national scale – so as to enlarge the base of supporters for the project.

UNQUOTE.

The FACLA Board of Directors received with utmost courtesy the chairman and CEO of the Filipino-Greek American real-estate developer but it did not act on the proposal. And so, the idea of doing or turning the FACLA property – now estimated to have a market value of approximately \$2-million – into a prestige address of a Philippine Center continues to be a dream.

(Next is "The Filipino Version of 'We Have a Problem, Houston' (Part 3)")

To read Part One of this series, please click this link [It Is Time to Reinvent the Filipino Presence in America and Build Philippine Centers](#)

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