Draft for Public Review The Central Waterfront Neighborhood Plan



San Francisco Planning Department
As Part of the Better Neighborhoods Program
December 2002

San Francisco Planning Department

BETTER NEIGHBORHOODS



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Prepared with and for the Citizens of the Central Waterfront Area by the San Francisco Planning Department As Part of the Better Neighborhoods Program December 2002







Envision...

that the Central Waterfront has grown to accommodate both new housing and neighborhood commercial services while maintaining its role as an area of important economic activity; it has evolved but its character remains familiar. It is a neighborhood of well-designed, mixed-use buildings that take advantage of transit and a place where new, cutting-edge businesses have appeared next door to more traditional light industrial uses. It is a place better connected to the rest of the city, with an improved public realm, welcoming streets, and where historic structures have been preserved, providing glimpses into the area's past. It is a place that has grown and carefully maintained an unusual mix of uses; it is a neighborhood that has achieved a balance in the process of becoming a better place.

This is the vision that has emerged from two years of community planning in the Central Waterfront. During the last few years, as the city has been besieged by the ups and downs of economic cycles, the neighborhood has found itself the site of ill-considered development. But it will also soon benefit from a major transit investment in the form of the Third Street Light Rail. The neighborhood has become the site of struggle over competing needs—to preserve space for production, distribution, and repair business and to provide much-needed housing—placing it at a defining moment in its evolution. What to do about the Central Waterfront involves more than a discussion of the neighborhood itself, it leads to questions about its larger role in the city, and more specifically, about the role of industrial activity in San Francisco.

The Central Waterfront Neighborhood Plan provides a blueprint for ensuring that new growth is coordinated in a way that creates a robust urban neighborhood and supports the area's role in the city as a whole. Because of their interest and concern, the residents of the neighborhood are, through this plan, setting the Central Waterfront on the path to a better future.

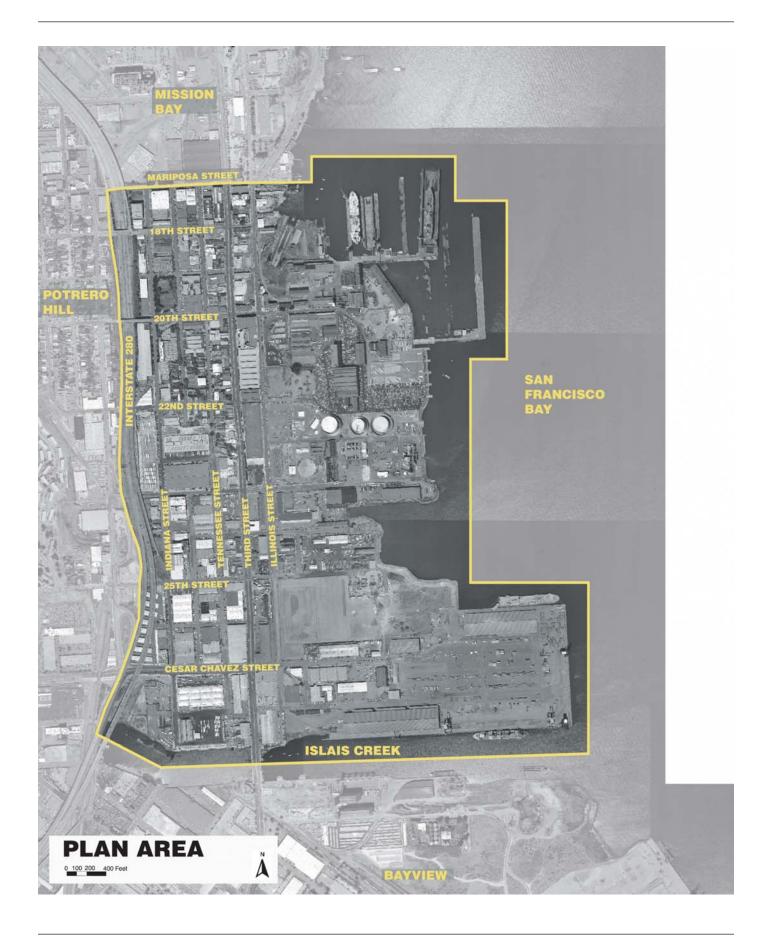
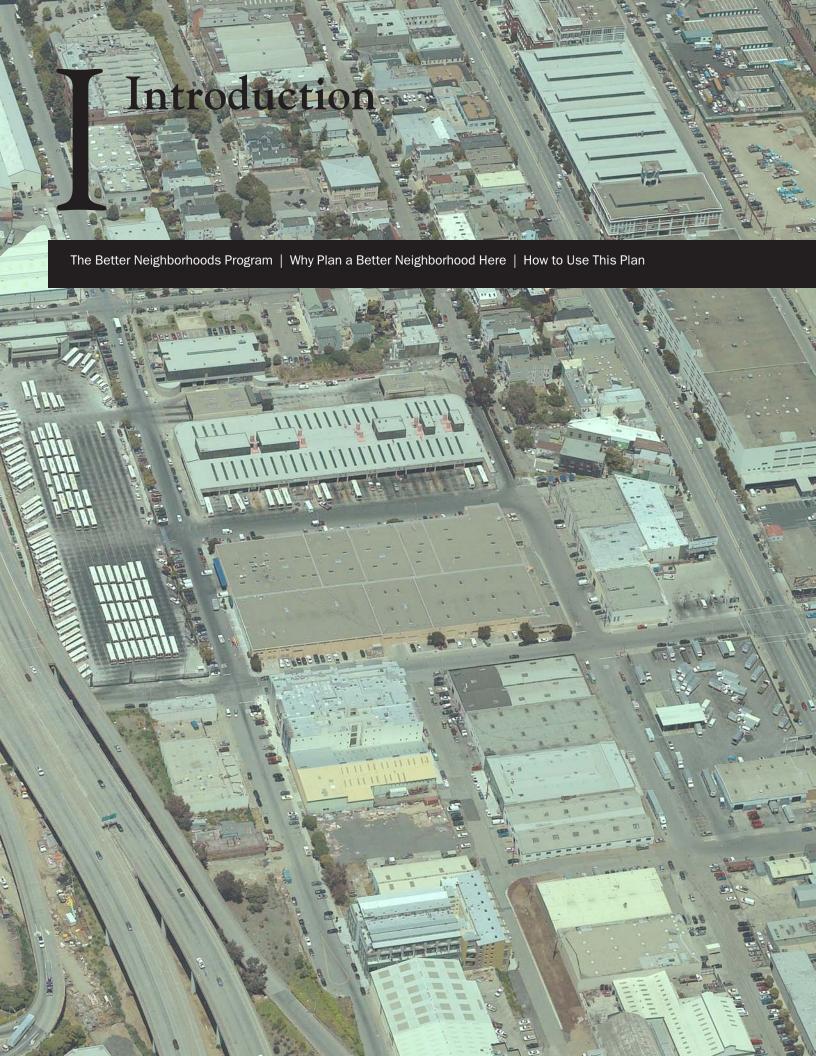


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Acknowledgements Contacts



This section of the plan opens with background information on the Better Neighborhoods Program, including the reasons that the Central Waterfront was selected to be part of the program, and a description of how the plan is organized and who it is for. The section closes with the six goals that are at the heart of the plan. Achieving these goals is essential to fulfilling the vision for the neighborhood's future.

The Eight Elements of a Good Neighborhood

Part of the dialogue with the community was about the elements that contribute to a good urban neighborhood. The following were thought to comprise the eight elements of a good neighborhood.

Walk to Shops

A great neighborhood has stores and shops that satisfy everyday needs within an easy walk from home. Everyday shops and services include corner groceries, day care, cafes and restaurants, banks, dry cleaners, bakeries, and the like. An easy walk is about five to ten minutes.

Safe Streets

A great neighborhood has safe and friendly streets. In a great neighborhood people can walk without fear of crime, being threatened by traffic, or being disturbed by excessive noise. People feel like they "belong" on neighborhood streets. Residential streets feel public, and more like open space than trafficways. Streets are a pleasant part of the neighborhood.

Getting Around Easily

A great neighborhood has many choices for moving to, from, and within it. Great neighborhoods find it easy to move about on foot, by bicycle, transit, and auto. They accommodate the car, but allow people to live easily without one.

Housing Choices

A great neighborhood has a variety of housing types. A mix of houses, flats, and apartments of various sizes meet different needs and preferences.

Gathering Places

A great neighborhood has places for people to meet, talk, and be neighborly. Public gathering places include parks, plazas, sidewalks, and shops.

City Services

A great neighborhood has a full range of public services for residents. Public services include parks, schools, police and fire stations, libraries, and other amenities.

Special Character

A great neighborhood has its own special character. All neighborhoods are shaped by their physical setting, streets, buildings, open spaces, history, culture and the people who live in them. In great neighborhoods these attributes combine in unique and memorable ways.

Part of the Whole

Great neighborhoods make great cities. Great neighborhoods stand out on their own, yet are connected to the city. They can be a refuge for their residents, but also a part of the city's wider community.

















The Better Neighborhoods Program

The development boom of the late 1990s found San Franciscans at odds. Where some would push for development anywhere at any cost, others opposed it just as stridently. The city was nearly paralyzed, and seemed unable to make rational choices regarding change. In response, the Planning Department conducted a citywide land use survey, proposed interim controls on industrially zoned lands, and initiated the Citywide Action Plan, a rational framework for balancing job growth, housing needs, and quality of life.

The Better Neighborhoods Program is one pillar of the Citywide Action Plan. It has carried the discussion of change to three pilot neighborhoods, where development issues are perhaps felt most acutely but where it makes most sense to find acceptable ways to build much-needed housing. Discussions with these communities uncovered profound issues that need to be addressed if the city is to continue to thrive.

San Francisco has a heritage of building well. A look around at the beauty of this place and the way it is revered by residents and visitors alike shows this. But the evidence around us also suggests that we may have lost some of our will to build good neighborhoods respectful of place. We are paying the price. San Franciscans have become concerned, and their concerns seem justified.

There are many factors that may contribute to a degradation of our public realm. National financial markets may impose inappropriate "suburban" development models on cities, development projects may seek to express private values at the expense of public place-making (although these projects derive much of their value from the qualities of the place), construction economies and methods may work against San Francisco's fine-grained scale and rhythm, street fronts—always places primarily for pedestrians—may be given over to parking or blank walls, planning controls may be at odds with good place-making, unnecessary oversight may be imposed on projects that ought to be allowed as of right, and materials and details may be inappropriate to good city building.



Working through issues at a community workshop.



Bus and walking tours were important parts of initiating the planning process and dialogue.

Also, the public realm has suffered over time as a result of the accommodation of autos over other ways of moving about, and this accommodation has not been successful even for those who drive. It has degraded our streets as places for pedestrians, as well as a system for moving about by foot, bike, transit, and auto.

Many San Franciscans know that something is wrong with our current development practices, and even the most civicminded have begun to respond to change by opposing it. If they do not try to stop a project, people demand changes that sometimes seem to be more about unfocused frustration than about creating good new development that could benefit a neighborhood. They have little evidence that change can improve their neighborhood and help create and maintain if not strengthen its sense of place. It has become clear through our community discussions that we need to resolve to build well if we are to retain our role as a vibrant, world-class city, and if we are to accommodate change gracefully. And having made such resolve, we need to give the development community the certainty it needs to take on the risks of building well. Meeting these challenges head on is the goal of the Better Neighborhoods Program.

The Better Neighborhoods Program is a tool kit for building well and with a sense of place. It calls for a few simple things that, together, are the keys to good San Francisco placemaking. Recognizing that population growth is both inevitable and beneficial, it calls for building housing—as much as possible at an appropriate scale and as affordably as possible—in neighborhoods well-served by transit and other urban services and amenities. It calls for strong neighborhood commercial cores that allow people to satisfy their daily needs by walking and bicycling and without the need to rely on an auto. It calls for gracious streets and public spaces that serve everyone well and that are the life-blood of neighborhood life. And it asks that we design and build well and with care, at a human scale and with respect for the public realm. We know how to do all this. We need only to want to begin.

This public review draft describes the ways to achieve these goals in the Central Waterfront. This is not the end of the community dialogue. The plan is now being brought back to the neighborhood for specific consideration, review, comment, and discussion, in the hopes of crafting a coherent set of rules that will offer the best possible solutions among many differing interests, with a certainty that will assure the communities that invite the change as well as those who will take the development risks to bring it about.

Why Plan a Better Neighborhood Here

- The city is in a housing crisis. Every neighborhood needs to determine what its share of housing development should be. The Central Waterfront was one of the first places to be identified as having the capacity to accommodate a significant amount of new housing. This has been due mostly to the perception that the Central Waterfront contains a large amount of underused land and is home to businesses that do not need to be in San Francisco to serve the city. However, the fact is that the Central Waterfront is home to many important, vibrant businesses and thousands of jobs. It is crucial to determine what the Central Waterfront's role in the city should be—a new residential neighborhood, a place dedicated to economic activity, or a mixture of the two.
- The Central Waterfront is an area that has seen too much inappropriate development. Recently, the Central Waterfront has been the focus of development generated by the recent economic boom cycle, much of it in the form of live/work units. Live/work development was not sufficiently dense, served only a small niche of the population, and in its design did not enrich the public realm nor contribute to the vibrancy of streets. Furthermore, the influx of live/work units has brought new residents into areas traditionally the home of production, distribution, and repair activities. Both construction of the units themselves and the new residents have forced many once-thriving businesses out of the neighborhood, and sometimes out of the city entirely. Before the recent economic downturn, the demand for office space also pressured these businesses to relocate. It is critical to plan now, in anticipation of the next economic upswing, to ensure that future development is the right kind in the right place.
- Muni's Third Street Light Rail will soon serve the neighborhood. This significant investment in transit makes the neighborhood an alluring place for residential development. While it is important to focus development around transit nodes, the case for encouraging mixed-use development, in particular housing or offices, along the entire length of a transit line in the Central Waterfront is not open and shut. Because new development would likely out-compete existing PDR

- businesses for space, determining what kind of development is appropriate, how much, and where, is critical. This issue is best addressed through a community planning process.
- Waterfront does not have a strong neighborhood "heart." The Central Waterfront has a very particular, if not unique, mixed-use character with which its residents and workers closely identify. However, there are few neighborhood services and amenities to meet the needs of residents or workers. Centers of activity and places of interest are scattered and not well linked, and connections to adjacent areas, especially Potrero Hill and the new Mission Bay development, need to be strengthened.
- Existing planning policy and its implementation through the Planning Code do not present a clear or appropriate future for the neighborhood. The neighborhood needs to prepare for changes beyond just the Third Street Light Rail. Development at Mission Bay, immediately to the north, is underway and will have an effect on the Central Waterfront. The Port is also hoping to develop its Pier 70 Mixed Use Opportunity Site; any new uses at that site need to be well integrated into the neighborhood. Furthermore, community members have shown a will for positive change, and presented a vision for the neighborhood in 1999. All of these things, in addition to points raised above, represent challenges not sufficiently addressed in current policy.

How to Use the Plan

This plan will be an implementing document of the city's *General Plan*. As such, it is a policy framework that will be the basis of new zoning and planning code controls for the area, as well as urban design guidelines, housing policies, and an implementation program for public improvements by various public agencies. This is a public review draft of the plan. Once reviewed and refined through discussions with the community, the Planning Commission will be asked to adopt the plan and the Board of Supervisors to approve it. Specific proposals for rezoning, planning code changes, and the public improvements will follow the plan's adoption.

The Planning Department, Planning Commission, and Board of Supervisors will use it as the basis for re-zoning or other governing regulatory actions within the plan area, to evaluate development proposals, to work with architects and developers to achieve goals stated in the plan, and to coordinate the actions and plans of institutions and agencies such that they progress toward the vision of this plan. The Planning Department will use this plan to make recommendations to the Planning Commission as to whether to approve or disapprove development proposals based on their consistency with this plan.

This plan will provide a guide for other city departments, agencies, and commissions in their decisions affecting the plan area. For example, the Department of Public Works, which oversees the city's streets and sidewalks, will use the plan to evaluate requests for the expansion of sidewalks; Muni will use the plan to guide transit investments; and the Department of Recreation and Parks will tailor plans for new open space and community facilities to the plan.

This plan will inform *developers, architects, and engineers* of issues of concern to the neighborhood, quantitative and qualitative guidelines that must be followed in development, goals to be achieved, and policies and standards by which their work and proposals will be reviewed.

Above all, this plan is a tool for the neighborhood and community at large. Hopefully, this plan will provide a vision for development around which local residents, businesses, the development community, and the city at-large can rally. It will further provide general education and awareness about the future development in the area so that residents can know what to expect as the area develops, and developers and others can know what and how to build. This plan provides the basis for the community to assess how the ideas and actions of institutions, developers, and city and state agencies are consistent with the plan's vision, as well as a legal basis to hold these players to it.