

Draft for Public Review

The Market and Octavia Neighborhood Plan



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

San Francisco Planning Department

BETTER NEIGHBORHOODS
2002



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Market and Octavia Neighborhood Plan

Prepared with and for the Citizens of the Market and Octavia
neighborhood by the San Francisco Planning Department
As Part of the Better Neighborhoods Program
December 2002



This plan is dedicated to the people of the Market and Octavia neighborhood. Your vision, commitment, support, and belief that you can have a better neighborhood, make it possible. We are bringing this plan draft to you for more consideration, review, comment, and discussion.

Envision an urban neighborhood that provides for a mix of people of various ages, incomes, and lifestyles—a place where everyday needs can be met within a short walk on a system of public streets that are easy and safe to get around on foot, on bicycle, and by public transportation. Imagine a place intimately connected to the city as a whole where owning a car is a choice, not a necessity, and streets are attractive and inviting public spaces. Imagine a neighborhood repaired and rejuvenated by building on the strengths of its long-standing character, yet inherently dynamic, creative, and evolving.

This is the vision that emerged from the community planning effort that began over two years ago in the Market and Octavia neighborhood.

The Market and Octavia neighborhood is a distinct, yet fuzzy-edged, part of San Francisco. It has its own character, while at the same time melding seamlessly into the city as a whole. It's a neighborhood that welcomes, even insists upon, a mix of people that represent a variety of incomes and lifestyles, poor as well as wealthy and all the categories in between. It's a neighborhood that isn't afraid to confront the freeway that has divided it and demand a better future.

Market and Octavia is at a unique place in its history. The last fifty years here is a story of a community besieged by large projects serving regional needs at the expense of the neighborhood. Largely because of its people, today we are working to remedy that history. With the Better Neighborhoods Program, the city is ready to reinvest in Market and Octavia's potential as a vibrant urban neighborhood, an essential part of the city.

There is much that can be improved and much opportunity to be realized. Now is a fine time for an exuberant start.



The Market and Octavia Neighborhood Plan Area

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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.

An Introduction to 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. ¹

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 felt acutely and where it makes sense to find a positive model for providing 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 are 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, materials and details may be inappropriate to good city-building.

¹ For a complete overview of the Citywide Action Plan, see Appendix i.



Bus and walking tours were an important part of initiating the community planning process.



Local residents and businesses have brought strong opinions to the table.



From the beginning, community workshops have defined the issues and vision.

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 civic-minded have begun to respond to change by opposing it. 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 place making. 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 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 a neighborhood. 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 begin.

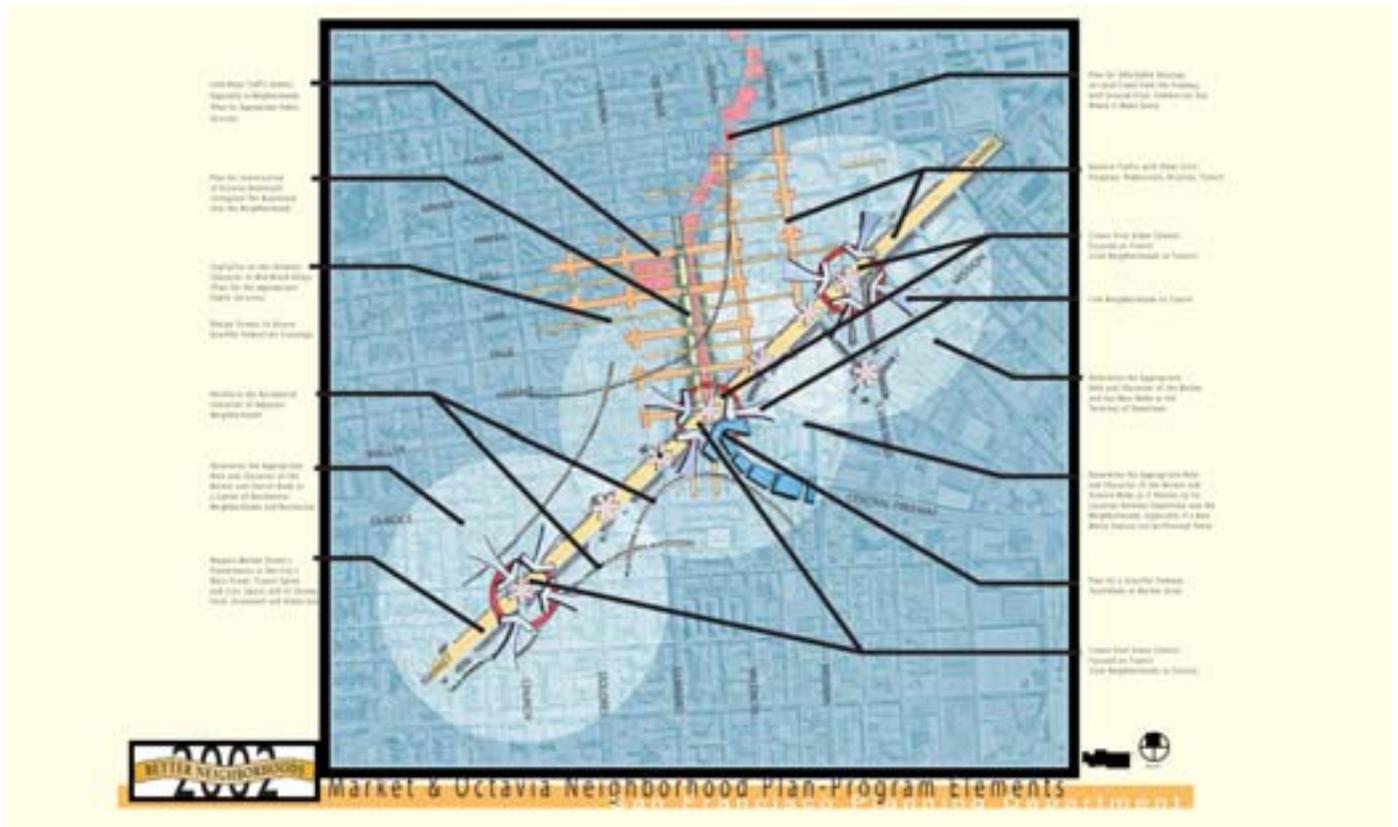
This public review draft describes the ways to achieve these goals in the Market and Octavia neighborhood. This is not the end of the community dialogue. The plan is now being brought back to the neighborhood for review, comment, and discussion, in the hopes of crafting a coherent set of rules that will 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.

Goals for the Market and Octavia Neighborhood

Since the plan's beginning, we have discussed the problems that arise in daily life here and talked about the improvements that forward-looking planning can bring to the neighborhood. Together, we arrived at goals that guide the plan for the Market and Octavia neighborhood:

- Do not displace people - no homes should be lost.
- Encourage diverse and affordable housing.
- Create choices for movement - foster alternatives to the car.
- Make streets safe and attractive places to walk, bike, and meet.
- Repair and enhance the neighborhood's urban fabric - build on strengths.
- Provide for convenient neighborhood services.
- Value residences, shops, and active uses over automobile parking.
- Tear down the Central Freeway and build the new Octavia Boulevard.

A summary of planning goals from one of the first workshops.



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.

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.

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 also 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.