

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





I Overview

Why Plan a Better Neighborhood Here | The Plan Framework



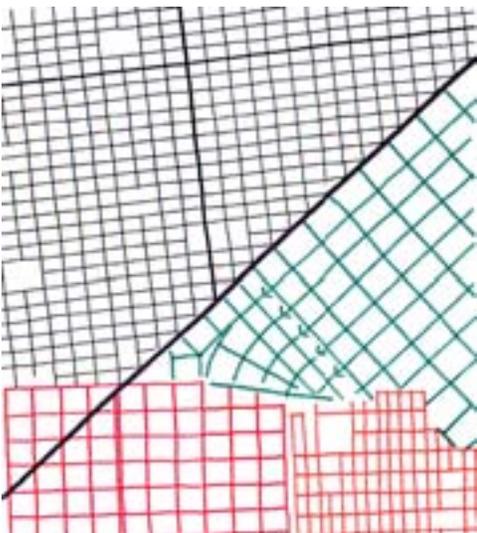
This section describes why the Market and Octavia neighborhood was chosen as one of three pilot areas for the Better Neighborhoods Program, and provides an overview of the policy framework that guides the plan.



The Market and Octavia neighborhood is easily accessible from the entire the Bay Area...



and is at the center of the city.



Three of the city's grid systems come together here...

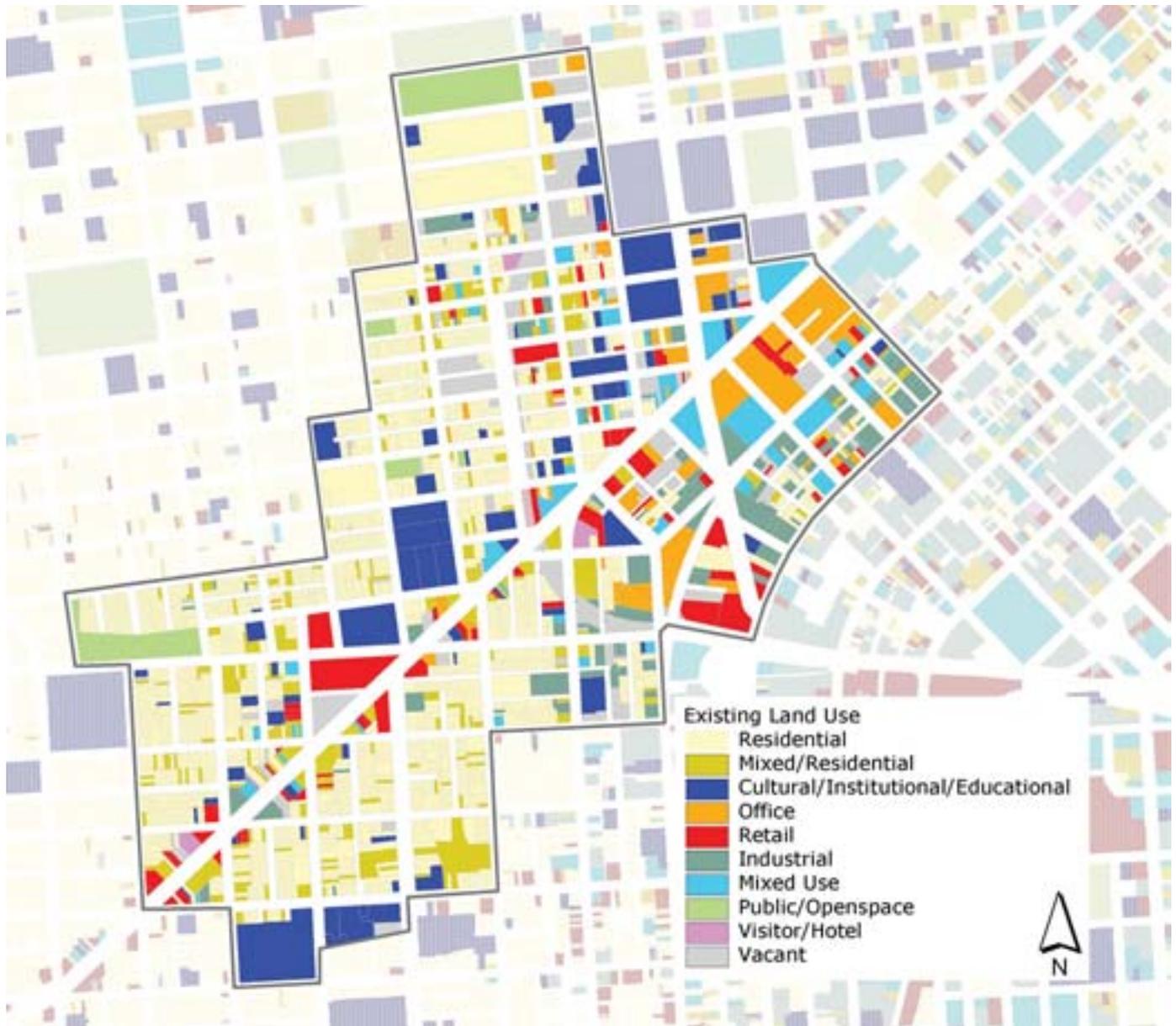
Why Plan a Better Neighborhood Here?

As one of three neighborhoods in the Better Neighborhoods Program, the Market and Octavia neighborhood offers a distinct set of opportunities, given its unique place in the city and the region. At the center of the city, it sits at a remarkable confluence of city and regional transportation. It is accessible from the entire Bay Area by BART and the regional freeway system. More than a dozen transit lines cross the Market and Octavia neighborhood, including all of the city's core streetcar lines, which enter the downtown here. It is just west of the Civic Center, where several large regional destinations (City Hall and state and federal office buildings, Herbst Theatre, and other cultural institutions) attract a wide range of people both day and night.

The Market and Octavia neighborhood sits at the junction of three of the city's grid systems. The north of Market, south of Market, and Mission grids meet at Market Street, creating a distinct pattern of irregular blocks and intersections, and bringing traffic from these grids to Market Street. The surrounding topography of the Western Addition, Nob Hill, Cathedral Hill, and Twin Peaks flattens out in this area, creating a geography that makes the Market and Octavia neighborhood a natural point of entry to the downtown from the rest of the city. As a result of its central location, it has long been both a crossroads—a place that is passed through—as well as distinctive part of the city in its own right.



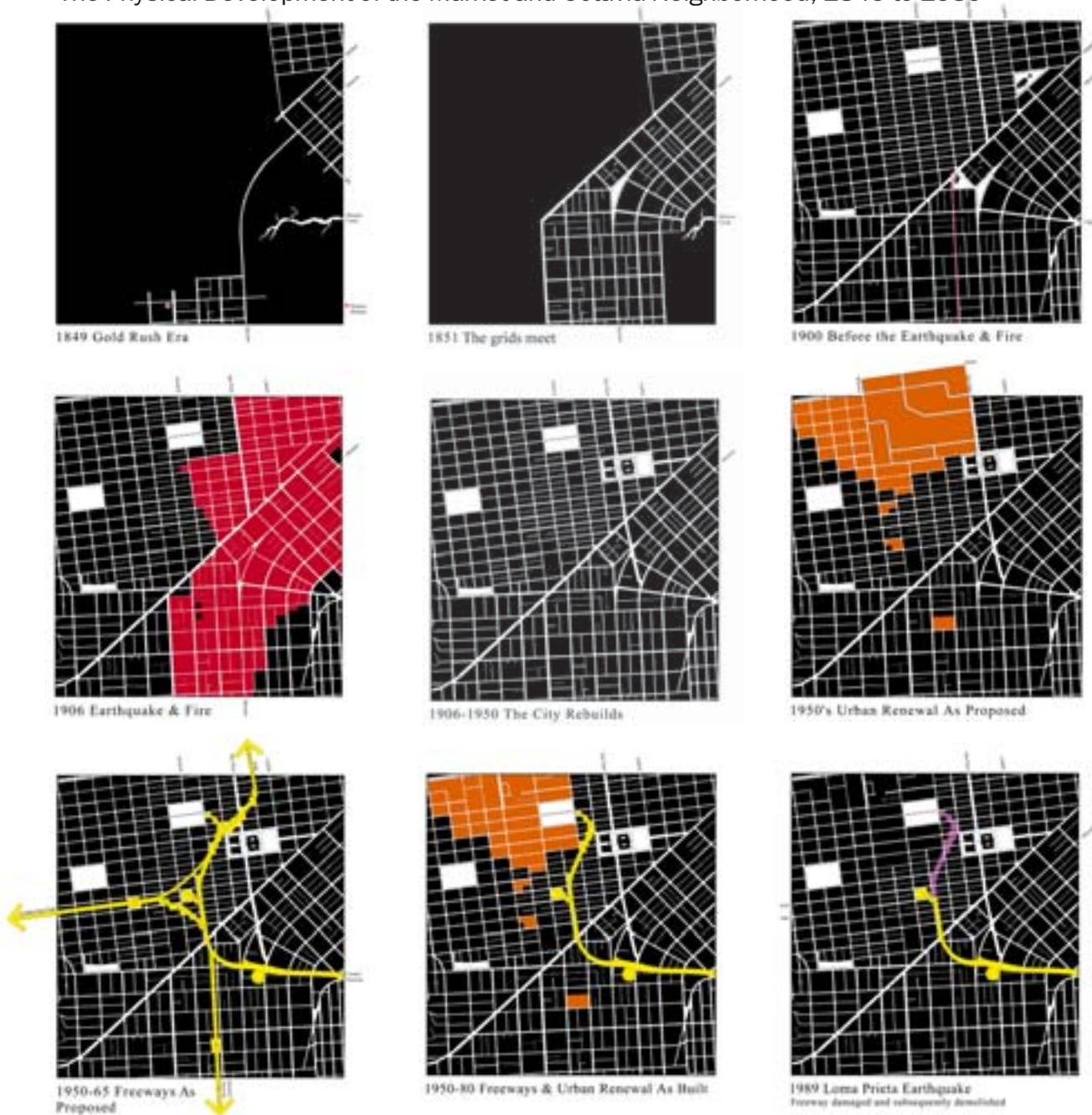
creating a natural confluence of city and regional transit service.



Existing Land Uses

The Market and Octavia neighborhood is a truly urban place, with a diversity of character and quality in its various parts. Local residents will tell you that the area is an “in-between”— a place that supports a variety of lifestyles, ages, and incomes. Its varied but close-knit pattern of streets and alleys, along with relatively gentle topography, make it very walkable and bikeable. It has excellent access to city and regional public transit and offers a good variety of commercial streets that provide access to daily needs. It has a rich pattern of land uses that integrates a diversity of housing types, commercial activities, institutions, and open spaces within a close-knit physical fabric.

The Physical Development of the Market and Octavia Neighborhood, 1845 to 1989



The Market and Octavia neighborhood has been subject to many transformations, from the 1906 earthquake and fire to the freeway and urban renewal programs of the 1960's.



Sidewalks are often not adequate for the safe and comfortable movement of pedestrians.

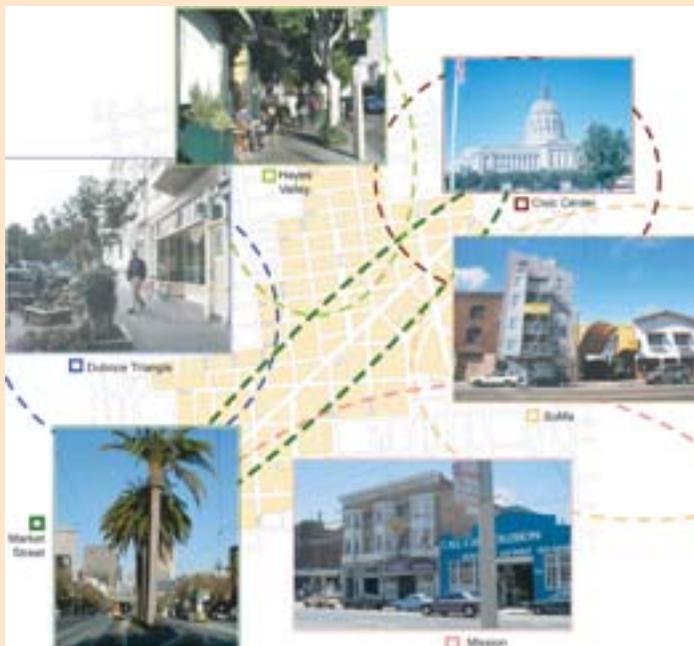


Because so much traffic moves through the plan area, transit delays are common and affect the citywide Muni system.

The Market and Octavia neighborhood’s strengths as an urban place, as an exciting “in-between”, are fragile. Its role as a crossroads poses enormous challenges. Over the past 100 years, the imposition of large infrastructure and redevelopment projects have deeply scarred the area’s physical fabric. Whole city blocks were assembled for large redevelopment projects in the 1960’s and 1970’s. Large flows of automobile traffic are channeled through to the Central Freeway via major arteries such as Fell/Oak, Gough/Franklin, and Van Ness Avenue.

Street management practices meant to expedite these flows have degraded the quality of its public spaces and conflicts between cars and pedestrians have made streets hostile to public life. Because large flows of automobile traffic and core transit lines converge here, there are competing needs for a limited amount of space on streets. Transit vehicles are often stuck in traffic, undermining transit service and reliability citywide and adding to traffic congestion. Parking requirements have led to buildings in recent years with long, dead, and undifferentiated facades that greatly, and more or less permanently, diminish the quality of its streets.

At the same time, there are tremendous opportunities for positive change in the Market and Octavia neighborhood—opportunities to build on its strengths as an urban place and to create a better future.



At the neighborhood’s center is the elevated Central Freeway – what will be the new Octavia Boulevard. Hayes Valley, portions of Duboce triangle, and pockets elsewhere have fine-grained residential areas with a fabric of residential buildings on narrow lots, much of it disrupted by the Central Freeway. In portions of the Western Addition, redevelopment replaced this fabric with large residential projects on large blocks. West of the Civic Center, large commercial and institutional buildings step down in height from the downtown and the commercial activity of places like Hayes and Sanchez Street, and Market and Valencia Streets, all of which are now being revitalized. Portions of South of Market have been degraded by the freeway and major traffic flows. Today, there are real opportunities



The former freeway parcels provide an unparalleled opportunity to repair the physical fabric and bring new vitality to the neighborhood.



The quality and accessibility of transit in the area creates real opportunities to reduce individual reliance on automobiles.

The Market and Octavia neighborhood will undergo dramatic renewal as the Central Freeway is removed north of Market Street. With the passage of Proposition E in 1998, construction of a graceful and functional surface boulevard to replace the structure will free up over 7 acres of land for infill development that will help repair the divisions created by the Central Freeway. As part of this effort, there is an opportunity to rationalize regional traffic flows and minimize their negative effects on the quality of life of the area, as well as to plan for the reuse of several other large sites.

The Market and Octavia neighborhood can grow largely on the back of transit. In addition to repairing its physical fabric, new development can take advantage of the area's rich transit access to provide new housing and other amenities for people, and to reduce new traffic and parking problems associated with too many cars in the area. Because the Market and Octavia neighborhood's location supports a lifestyle that doesn't have to rely on automobiles, space devoted to moving and storing them can be dramatically reduced—allowing more housing and services to be provided more efficiently and affordably. Market and Octavia can capture the benefits of new development while minimizing the negative effects of more automobiles.

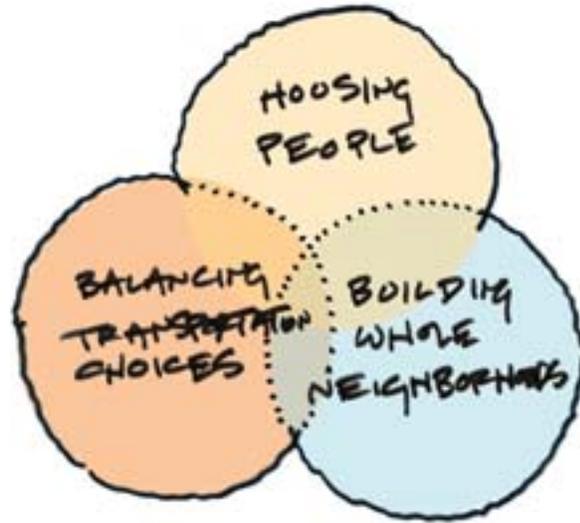
If planned well, new development will strengthen and enhance the Market and Octavia neighborhood. With the removal of the Central Freeway and construction of the new Octavia Boulevard, there is a strong desire here to repair damage done in past decades and realize its full potential as a vibrant urban place. There is potential for new mixed-use development here, including a significant amount of new housing. With the added vitality that new housing and other uses will bring, the area's established character as an urban place can be strengthened and enhanced.

Housing People: Market and Octavia’s diverse local population creates the community, vitality, and safety of the place. Housing a diverse group of people means providing a variety of housing opportunities: different housing types, as well as ranges of affordability, provided in a safe and attractive setting.

Balancing Transportation Choices: The Market and Octavia area has a physical fabric that enables people to access much of what they need on foot and supports frequent and reliable transit service. Over time, this fabric has been successful because it supports a range of travel modes and enables people to choose between them as their needs dictate. It shows in people’s behavior; the average household in Market and Octavia owns ½ as many vehicles as in the city overall.¹ Automobiles have an important role here, but should not dominate to the point of undermining this long-standing fabric or the viability of other travel modes.

Building ‘Whole’ Neighborhoods: Urban places like the plan area work well because they support a critical mass of people and activities, which in turn makes it possible for a full range of services and amenities to thrive in close proximity. As these neighborhoods grow, more people bring the opportunity for these services—everyday retail needs and community services, as well as public spaces, parks, and streets—to thrive as the setting where community life is nurtured and strengthened.

The Plan Framework



The Market and Octavia neighborhood is at a critical juncture. Over the last 40 years, an imbalance in how we plan for the interrelated issues of housing, transportation, and land use has undermined our ability to provide housing and services efficiently, to provide streets that are the setting for public life, and to build on transit, bicycling, and walking as safe and convenient means of getting around our city. Nowhere is this imbalance clearer than here, where an elevated freeway, land assembly projects, and other well-meaning interventions have degraded the overall quality of the place.

As we look forward, there is much that can be done. This plan aims, above all, to restore San Francisco’s long-standing practice of building good urban places—providing housing that responds to human needs, offering people choice in how they get around, and building “whole” neighborhoods that provide a full range of services and amenities close to where people live and work. To succeed, the plan need only learn from the established urban structure that has enabled the Market and Octavia neighborhood, like other urban places, to work so well for people over time.

¹Based on 1990 Census data, the average vehicle ownership rate for the Market and Octavia plan area was .59 vehicles per household, as compared to 1.06 vehicles per household for the city overall.

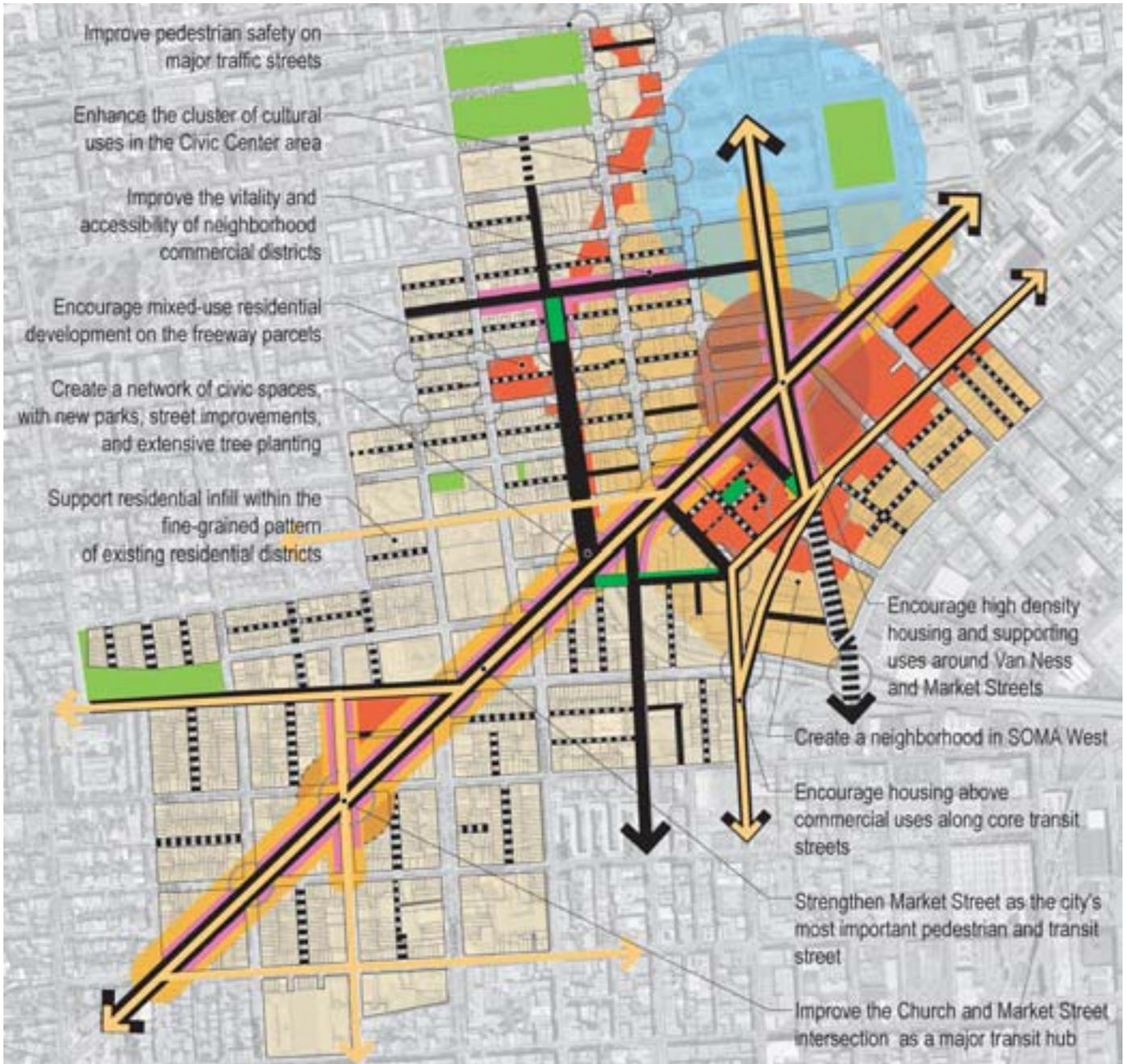


Ultimately, space is a limited resource in urban places. This plan restores balance in how we allocate space for housing, parking, and transportation generally.

If the Market and Octavia neighborhood's tradition of public activism on these issues is any indication, this plan will succeed by building on these strengths: enriching its critical mass of people and activities, enhancing the area's close-knit physical pattern, and investing in a transportation program that restores balance between travel modes. The plan addresses these issues holistically, as success with any one aspect depends on addressing the overall dynamic between them. To diminish any one aspect of the plan is to diminish the opportunity presented by the whole.

Building on the Market and Octavia neighborhood's strengths, the plan makes the following proposals:

- Encourage building forms that maximize housing opportunity, provide comfortable street enclosure and sun access, and enhance the area's established physical fabric by contributing to the quality of the place.
- Replace minimum parking requirements with parking maximums, allowing the flexibility to build more housing more affordably, freeing up ground floor space for retail and community services, and supporting more frequent and reliable transit service.
- Eliminate housing density limits, encouraging a variety of creative housing types to be developed and added to existing buildings within a coherent urban design program.
- Strengthen neighborhood-serving retail and services on established commercial streets well served by transit and within easy walking distance of all residential areas, reducing the need to drive.
- Improve streets and open spaces as the setting for the public life of the area and minimize the negative impacts of auto traffic by rationalizing its movement and reducing conflicts with other street users.
- Prioritize travel modes that move people most efficiently, establish dedicated space for transit vehicles on core transit streets, and improve the comfort and function of local streets to better serve pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Support demolition of the Central Freeway and construction of the new Octavia Boulevard, reintegrating the vacant freeway lands into the fabric of the neighborhood.



The Planning Framework

The vision of the plan is summarized in the diagram above – a blueprint for positive change in the Market and Octavia neighborhood.