



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

SF Context Statement Work Plan

Summary

Through development of the SF Context Statement (which in full is entitled the San Francisco Citywide Historic & Cultural Context Statement), the Planning Department provides a comprehensive framework for surveying, identifying and evaluating San Francisco's historic and cultural resources. The completed SF Context Statement will facilitate and guide the completion of neighborhood and thematic surveys, as well as evaluations of individual properties, in all areas of San Francisco. Such a document has not previously been available to the Planning Department or the community of San Francisco. The Planning Department's historic resource survey unit accomplishes the bulk of the work related the SF Context Statement, which is a part of the Department's Citywide Survey Program.

Objectives of the SF Context Statement

Development of the SF Context Statement as an organizing framework allows for consistent, informed evaluations of San Francisco's historic and cultural resources based on identified themes, geographic patterns, and time periods. The SF Context Statement describes the broad, overarching themes that have shaped the City over time, such as patterns of residential settlement, industrial and commercial growth, transportation and infrastructure development, landscape changes, and cultural events. San Francisco's themes are described in terms of defined periods of time, geographic areas such as neighborhoods and districts, and historical property types. The SF Context Statement documents the City's historical development from early indigenous, Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. settlements, through the many stages of urban growth and change that occurred in the 19th and 20th centuries, to include more recent periods of post-industrialism and central city renaissance.

The SF Context Statement also describes the types of properties that occur in the City that are associated with identified historic and cultural themes, patterns of development, significant events and important persons. Within descriptions of San Francisco's property types, there are discussions of character-defining features, integrity considerations and resource eligibility determinations. This information provides surveyors with a consistent framework within which to contextually identify, interpret and evaluate individual properties. The SF Context Statement discusses a wide range of property types that include buildings of various kinds, structures such as bridges and tunnels, landscape features, sites of cultural significance, and archeology. Architectural styles are also addressed.

While the scope of the SF Context Statement is comprehensive and far-reaching, its completion will not preclude the need in some cases for development of additional area-based or thematic context statements in order to fully inform surveys and property evaluations. However, the SF Context Statement strives to provide an advanced understanding to the aspects of San Francisco's historical and cultural development that have influenced its physical form. It also provides guidance and make recommendations for developing additional area-based or thematic contexts consistent with the overall framework presented in the SF Context Statement. The SF Context Statement may also be updated as new information becomes available.

Project Background

Context statements are established evaluative tools for surveying historic and cultural resources in San Francisco, as well as throughout California and the nation. The National Park Service defines a context as “An organizational structure for interpreting history that groups information about historic properties that share a common theme, a common geographical area, and a common time period.”¹ In instructions for documenting historic and cultural resources, the California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) references the National Park Service’s context-based methodology: “The significance of a historical resource is best understood and judged in relation to historic context. A historic context consists of: a theme, pattern, or research topic; geographical area; and chronological period. The theme, pattern or research topic provides a basis for evaluating the significance of a resource when it is defined in relation to established criteria.”²

On June 7, 2000, the San Francisco Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board (LPAB), by Resolution No. 527, adopted the OHP’s *Instructions for Recording Historical Resources* (1995) as the methodology for documenting historic and cultural properties in San Francisco. This resolution specified that context statements prepared in accordance with the OHP recordation manual, and reviewed for accuracy and adequacy by the LPAB, may be recommended for use in associated property evaluations, and that the Planning Department shall maintain a library of adopted context statements. Towards these ends, several area-based and thematic-based context statements have been developed for use in San Francisco surveys by the Planning Department, the LPAB, and various other public agencies and community organizations.

San Francisco is one of many cities in California and the nation that is developing, or has developed, a citywide context statement. Notably, the City of Los Angeles is currently undertaking a citywide context statement and survey program (SurveyLA). The previous and ongoing efforts of other cities serve as positive models for the development of the SF Context Statement. The Planning Department also works closely with OHP to ensure that the SF Context Statement is consistent with accepted formats and standards. In addition, the SF Context Statement draws from existing San Francisco neighborhood and theme-based context statements, including official and informal survey projects, while providing an overall organization to these earlier documents. Above all, the SF Context Statement includes a significant amount of new research into aspects of San Francisco’s historical and cultural development that were previously not sufficiently understood nor documented for the purposes of preservation planning.

Development of the SF Context Statement

In addition to the in-house expertise of Planning Department staff, the SF Context Statement benefits from the far-ranging knowledge, perspectives, and viewpoints of the San Francisco community. The Planning Department utilizes a broad group of experts and community members to inform development of the document, as follows:

Historic Preservation Commission³. The Planning Department provides semi-annual reports on the status of the SF Context Statement project to the San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), the City’s official panel of historic and cultural preservation experts. The

¹ National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin No. 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, 1990 (rev. 2002). <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/>

² California Office of Historic Preservation, *Instructions for Recording Historical Resources*, 1995. <http://ohp.parks.ca.gov/pages/1054/files/manual95.pdf>

³ The Historic Preservation Commission replaced the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board on January 1, 2009, pursuant to Proposition J in 2008.

Department also present draft documents, such as individual chapters of the SF Context Statement, to the HPC for review and comment as they are completed. Upon completion of the SF Context Statement, the Planning Department will present the document to the HPC and will request endorsement of the document for use as a guide in conducting historic and cultural resource surveys and individual property evaluations in San Francisco.

SF Context Advisors Panel. The Planning Department formed the SF Context Advisors Panel, a working group of local experts, to assist in guiding and focusing the work of staff during the development of the SF Context Statement. The Advisors Panel actively assists in such aspects as organization and content of the document, identification of themes, time periods, and property types, integration of previously existing context statements, and areas of new research. The Advisors Panel participates on a volunteer basis and meets quarterly. The Advisors Panel consists of approximately six to eight members, a combination of HPC members, former LPAB members, university scholars, community preservationists, and professional historians, in addition to Planning Department staff.

Expert Readers. The SF Context Statement is inclusive of the broad range of architectural, cultural, social and technological histories that have shaped San Francisco. As such, the SF Context Statement and various portions therein warrant review and comment by experts in specific themes, areas, or aspects of San Francisco's development. In particular, experts will be consulted regarding aspects of San Francisco history that have previously been overlooked or misunderstood, such as vernacular architectures, culturally significant properties, and modern resources. To meet this goal of inclusive histories and property types, the Planning Department is recruiting Expert Readers who are knowledgeable in specific areas relating to San Francisco's history. These individuals include experts in San Francisco ethnic and cultural histories, in economic production, labor, and class, as well as in various sub-fields of San Francisco's development, including archeology, pre-history, architectural history, engineering, landscapes, civic institutions, and the military. Expert Readers will be asked to review and comment on specific portions of the SF Context Statement as completed.

San Francisco Community. Members of the general public of San Francisco are invaluable participants in developing the SF Context Statement. The Planning Department provides forums for community members to both learn about and contribute important historical information regarding neighborhoods, buildings, cultural groups, events and significant persons. In addition to reports and endorsement hearings at the HPC, the Planning Department shares information about the SF Context Statement on the Planning Department website. This website serves several purposes: to provide information about the goals and progress of the SF Context Statement; to share working materials such as outlines and completed sections; and to solicit information or feedback regarding important areas of research, lesser-known topics, and contexts that merit community assessment.

Planning Department Staff. Planning Department staff historians who meet the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualifications Standards are assigned to the SF Context Statement. Matt Weintraub, Planner III, is the project manager for the SF Context Statement, and Mary Brown, Planner II, is the primary researcher for the SF Context Statement. Planning Department staff members are responsible for completing tasks related to the SF Context Statement that include: conducting research; writing and producing materials; coordinating review by advisors, experts, and the public; and distributing completed documents.

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The following task schedule applies to the SF Context Statement:

SF Context Statement Tasks:	Schedule:
Report semi-annually to Historic Preservation Commission on project status.	Ongoing.
Meet quarterly with the Advisors Panel to review and discuss outlines, draft chapters, and research findings.	Ongoing.
Develop Historic Contexts section of the Preservation page of the Planning Department's website.	Completed.
Review citywide context statement programs of other localities and work with the California Office of Historic Preservation on accepted standards and organization.	Completed.
Organize in-house context information, collect additional context information from outside sources, and identify areas of further research.	In progress; TBC March 2009.
Develop document outline including: scope, organization and layout of materials, and preliminary themes, geographic areas, and time periods.	In progress; TBC March 2009.
Develop chapters including: introduction, methodology, and San Francisco's patterns of physical development and related property types.	In progress; TBC June 2009.
Develop chapters that describe San Francisco's historic contexts based upon the National Park Service thematic framework for history and prehistory.	TBC March 2010.
Provide draft materials to Expert Readers for review and address comments received.	TBC March 2010.
Present completed SF Context Statement to the Historic Preservation Commission.	TBC June 2010.