

Draft for Public Review

The Market and Octavia Neighborhood Plan



San Francisco Planning Department
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A New Neighborhood in SoMa West

OBJECTIVE 7.1**A VIBRANT NEW MIXED-USE NEIGHBORHOOD IN SOMA WEST.****OBJECTIVE 7.2****A FUNCTIONAL, ATTRACTIVE, AND WELL-INTEGRATED PUBLIC REALM OF STREETS AND OPEN SPACES IN THE SOMA WEST AREA.**

The SoMa West Area.

Immediately south of Market Street between 11th Street and Valencia Street lies an area that relatively few San Franciscans know well. It is where the South of Market Street grid bumps awkwardly into and connects with the Mission grid, with an overhead freeway structure and a dank Division Street beneath, with freeway entrance and exit ramps, and with a wide variety of uses, considerable housing, and a handful of new residential developments.

There are tremendous opportunities for positive change in this area - what has come to be called "SoMa West". The city's General Plan envisions this area's transformation into a vibrant new mixed-use residential neighborhood, providing much-needed housing, a full range of new services and vibrant streets and public spaces. This plan carries forward this vision, proposing new zoning that encourages substantial new mixed-use housing development, as well as a dramatic program for recreating the public realm of streets and open spaces to serve a



Wide streets and large intersections here are some of the most dangerous and uninviting in the city for pedestrians.

new residential population. This is the one part of the Market and Octavia area where creating a new, truly high-density mixed-use neighborhood can be achieved and bring tremendous benefit to the city as a whole.

Realizing this vision will be no small task. Creating a neighborhood here will take more than changing the zoning. A great deal of vehicular traffic, much of it freeway-bound, pushes through the area's busy streets: South Van Ness, Mission, Duboce, and Division. As public spaces, these streets suffer from large unwelcoming areas of asphalt, awkward pedestrian islands, and high accident rates. Most are "no man's lands" without the most basic comforts for pedestrians. There are major, problematic intersections, two of the most dangerous for pedestrians at Market Street and Van Ness Avenue, and at South Van Ness Avenue and Mission Street, which claim lives every year.

New residential developments in the area attest to what this area could become. Major transit investments, planned for Van Ness Avenue and the Market / Mission Street corridors, add to the area's potential for a dramatic new future. Ultimately, it can happen only if the city takes an active role in undertaking the improvements proposed here. It will be a large project, costing roughly \$20 - 30 million in all. If the investment were made, it would set the stage for the creation of more than 2,000 new housing units as part of a new mixed-use neighborhood in an area that otherwise shows little promise or hope of realizing its position at the center of the city. More than in any other part of San Francisco, it is up to the city to seize the opportunity here, to encourage housing, and to invest in its streets and public spaces—thereby setting the stage for a real neighborhood to emerge in SoMa West.



The intersection of Van Ness Avenue from Market to Mission Street could be the center of a new mixed-use residential neighborhood.

OBJECTIVE 7.1

A VIBRANT NEW MIXED-USE NEIGHBORHOOD IN SOMA WEST.

While a small scattering of new housing is being built in SoMa West, the area has a tremendous untapped potential for substantial new residential development, supported by a full range of neighborhood-serving shops and services. To realize this potential, the area's existing zoning, which encourages large-scale commercial uses, will be changed to encourage a gradual transition to high-density residential uses with retail, services, and a limited amount of office uses on lower floors. Every effort should be made to encourage mixed-use housing development as part of a gradual conversion of the area with high-density residential uses above retail and commercial activities. Because the coarser, large-scale physical fabric of the area supports tall buildings in selected areas, residential towers should be encouraged as part of the overall urban form vision for the plan area.

Policy 7.1.1

Maintain a strong preference for housing as a desired use.

SoMa West is unlike the smaller-scale residential areas of the plan area. Buildings here typically house commercial uses, are typically taller and more bulky, and sit on larger parcels. Where there are opportunities for new development, the plan makes housing a priority above all other uses in hopes of creating a stronger residential presence in the area. To this end, the overall land use plan takes advantage of the unique scale of the SoMa West area to accommodate higher-density housing where there are opportunity sites close to transit and services. Retail and other uses that support new housing are encouraged on the ground floor as part of new development.

- Implement the proposed land use plan, as described in Element 1 of this plan.

Policy 7.1.2**Encourage residential towers on selected sites.**

In limited, select areas, slender residential towers are permitted above the streetwall height. Housing is the only permitted use in these towers. The form and bulk of towers has been carefully controlled so they are not overly imposing on the skyline and do not produce excessive wind or shadows on public spaces.

- Make housing a required use for all building area above the streetwall height, as described in Element 1 of this plan.
- Adopt special controls for residential towers to ensure a slender profile on the skyline, as described in Element 3 of this plan.

OBJECTIVE 7.2**A FUNCTIONAL, ATTRACTIVE AND WELL-INTEGRATED PUBLIC REALM OF STREETS AND OPEN SPACES IN THE SOMA WEST AREA.**

A great deal of vehicular traffic, much of it freeway bound from areas north of Market Street and from the west, pushes through SoMa West: South Van Ness Avenue and Mission, Duboce, and Division Streets. SoMa West is also lacking in public open space; what spaces do exist are impacted by traffic that makes them noisy and less than desirable. Public transit moves through this area, as do increasing numbers of cyclists. Most of its streets are not comfortable for pedestrians; many are dangerous. There are major, problematic intersections. Some of the worst are at Market Street / Van Ness Avenue, and at South Van Ness Avenue / Mission Street, Mission Street / Otis / Division Streets, and South Van Ness Avenue / Division Street.

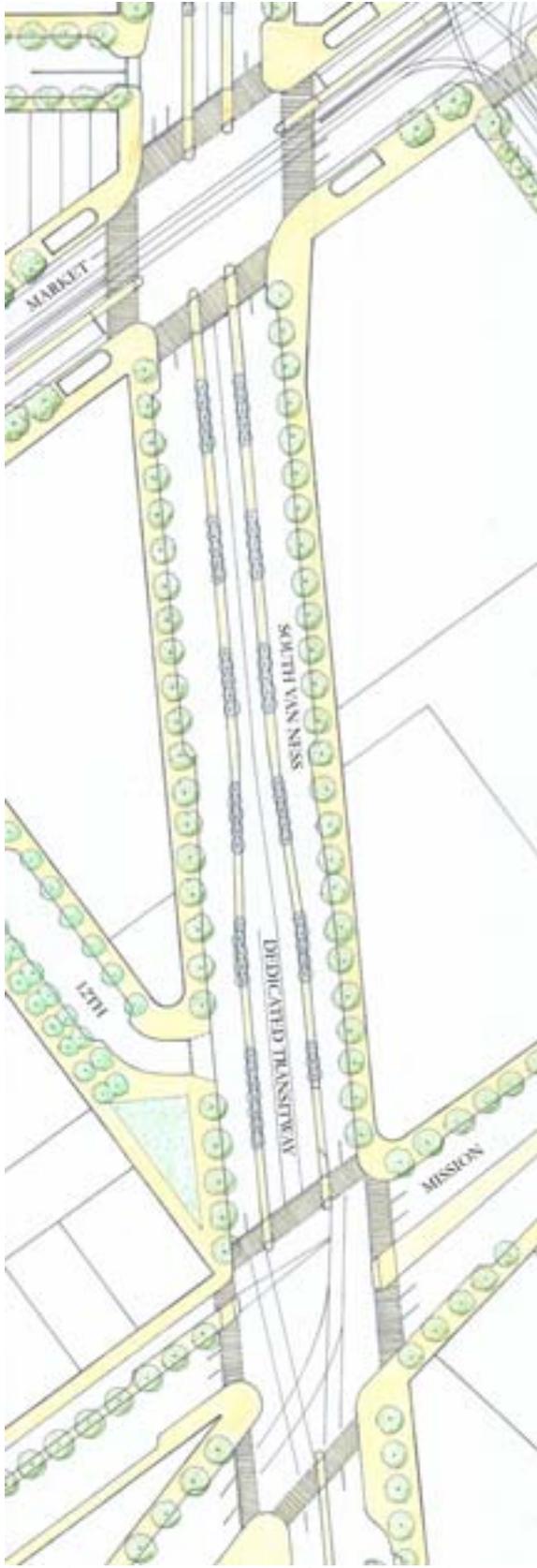
As the residential population of the area expands, every opportunity should be taken to improve pedestrian safety and calm traffic through the area. New neighborhood open spaces should be provided through the creation of new parks and plazas, as well as through the reclaiming of street spaces to widen sidewalks and improve spaces dedicated to pedestrian use. The following policies describe specific strategies to make these improvements.

Policy 7.2.1

Redesign South Van Ness Avenue from Mission Street to Division Street as a surface boulevard serving regional as well as local traffic.

Currently a no-man's land of wide expanses of asphalt and rather frantic traffic, South Van Ness Avenue, a state highway, could be a gracious, tree-lined boulevard with wonderful views to the south, comfortable for autos, buses, pedestrians, and cyclists alike. Moreover, it can and should be a street, like Van Ness Avenue north of Market Street, that new uses, particularly housing, seek out rather than shun.

- From Mission Street north to Lombard, create a dedicated transitway in the center of the street, beginning in the block between Mission and Market Streets. The transitway should include tree-lined medians that act as loading platforms, two lanes of vehicular traffic in each direction, parking lanes, and tree-lined sidewalks, as described in Element 5.
- From Mission Street to Howard Street and Division Street, South Van Ness Avenue takes considerable vehicular traffic to and from the freeway, and can be a classic multi-way tree-lined boulevard with two lanes of through-going traffic in each direction, and protected travel lanes, with parking for local traffic with local destinations (existing and future) that face the street. Bicycles can use the side access roads with safety and pedestrians can walk comfortably on sidewalks separated by two rows of trees from the central, faster traffic.



Street improvements proposed for South Van Ness Avenue, from Market to Mission Streets



Street improvements proposed for South Van Ness Avenue, from Mission to Howard Streets



Expanded sidewalks, extensive tree plantings, and transit improvements are envisioned for Otis Street, which currently has more space devoted to auto traffic than necessary.

Policy 7.2.2

Redesign Mission and Otis Streets from South Van Ness Avenue to Duboce Street with widened sidewalks and new transit preferential improvements.

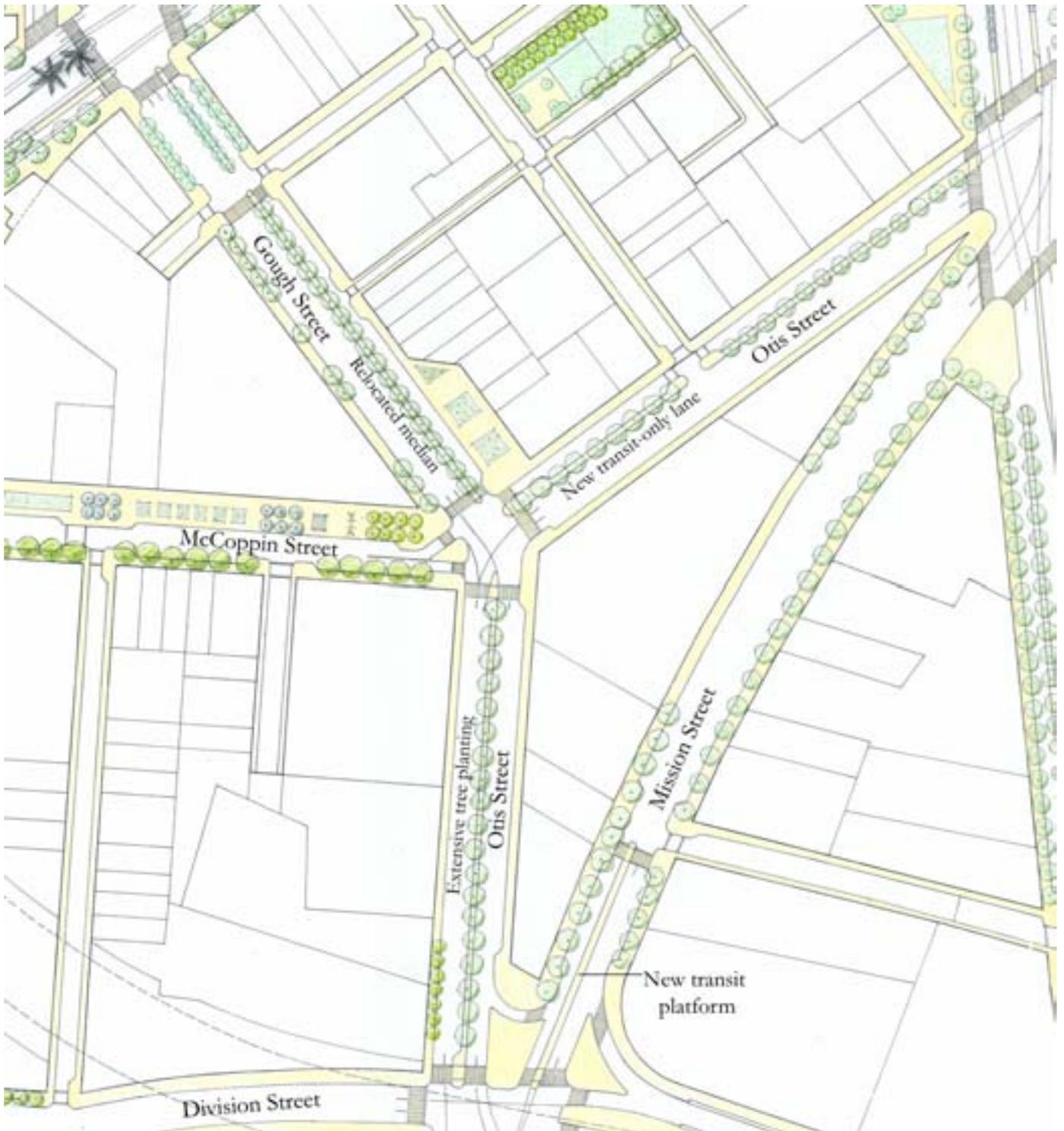
These two streets act as a one-way pair making the transition from downtown to the Mission District and, for Otis Street, carrying freeway-bound traffic from Gough Street. Mission district buses use this pair as well. Otis Street, particularly, is rather dark and unpleasant for pedestrians. Redesign can make these comfortable and efficient streets for buses, autos, pedestrians, and bicyclists. The scale of these streets can become more intimate and inviting for all users.

- The Otis Street right-of-way is wide enough to separate local-serving traffic from through traffic between Van Ness Avenue and Gough Street via a tree-planted median. A bus-only lane gives public transit the priority it needs. Between Gough and Duboce Streets, the freeway-bound traffic can be separated from the buses and the Mission district traffic, again by a planted median that will give the street a more human scale.
- Mission Street traffic, in this area, can be accommodated on fewer lanes, allowing for enhanced sidewalks consistent with the new residential development along it. A separate bus lane and a long and comfortable boarding platform at the Duboce / Division intersection will serve transit riders. This street can have parking lanes on both sides for most of its length.

Policy 7.2.3

Redesign Gough Street between Otis and Market Streets with widened sidewalks and a community gathering space or garden at the northeastern side of the Gough / Otis / McCoppin intersection.

Presently a wide, one-way street with no compelling attractions except for traffic, the wide right-of-way has space for three southbound moving lanes, a tree-lined median, and a northbound lane, with parking to provide a pedestrian realm that borders the small scaled "Brady Block" to the east.



Street improvements proposed for Gough and Otis Streets

Policy 7.2.4**Redesign McCoppin Street as a linear green street with a new open space west of Valencia Street.**

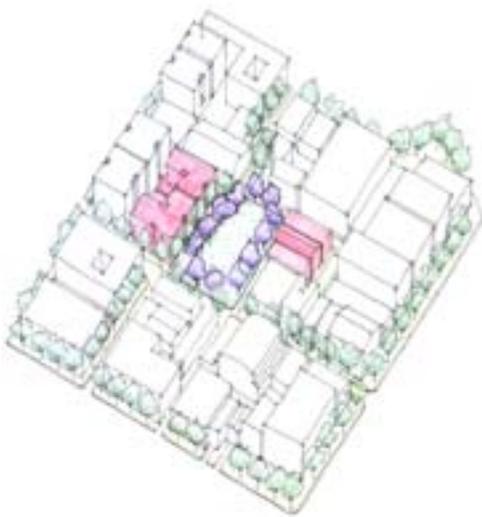
With the new freeway touchdown, traffic accessing the freeway will no longer have the option of using McCoppin Street as a cut-through. As a result, the street will carry only a fraction of the traffic that it does today. Anticipating this change, there is the opportunity to reconfigure McCoppin Street from Otis to Valencia Streets as a linear green street, with a substantial portion of the vehicular right-of-way reclaimed as open space on the north side (the sunny side) of the street, and a calmed right-of-way for local traffic. The portion of McCoppin Street west of Valencia Street will no longer be needed for vehicular traffic, providing the opportunity for a small open space. The space, approximately 80 feet by 100 feet, would provide an excellent location for a small plaza or other form of community space for the use of local residents.



A linear “green” street proposed for McCoppin Street



The Brady Block is home to a mix of uses and has an intricate network of midblock alleys. The center of the block is consumed almost entirely by surface parking lots.



Extensive street improvements, tree plantings and a new public open space in the center of the block will provide the setting for small-scaled housing infill.

Policy 7.2.5

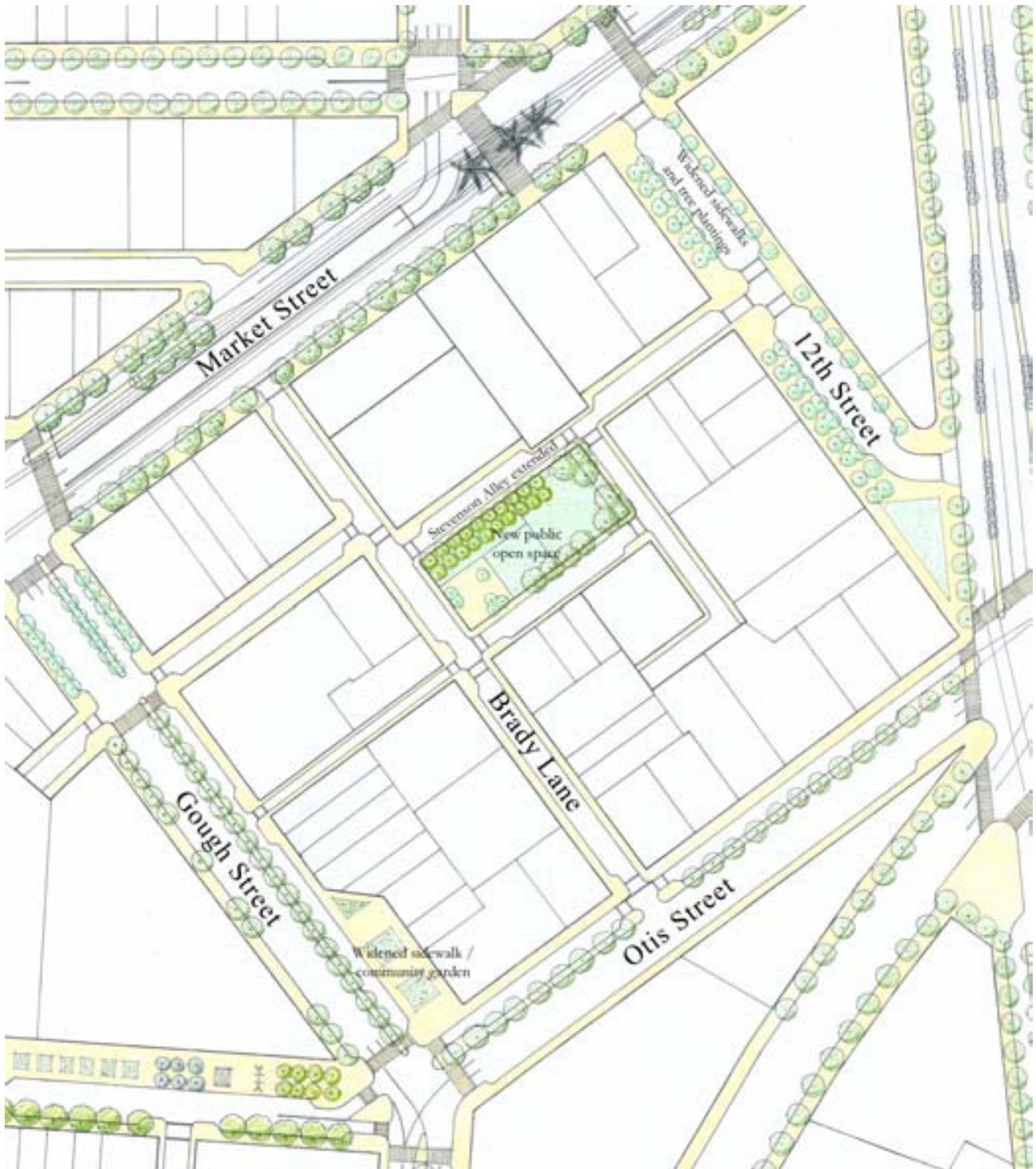
Make pedestrian improvements within the block bounded by Market, Twelfth, Otis, and Gough Streets and redesign Twelfth Street between Market and Mission Streets, creating a new park and street spaces for public use, and new housing opportunities.

The block bounded by Market, Gough, Otis and 12th Streets, known as the "Brady Block" is a unique place, in that its interior is divided and made publicly-accessible by four different alleys bisecting it in different directions. At its core, the block shows the signs of many years of neglect; surface parking lots and a large ventilation shaft for the BART system create a large swath of undefensible space.

The block has tremendous potential despite its present conditions. It is an intimate space of small buildings facing on narrow alleys. It isn't hard to envision a small neighborhood here-on the scale of Southpark: small residential infill and existing buildings framing a new public park at the core of the block's network of alleys. The addition of new housing and the development of a small-scaled living area with a narrow but connected street pattern can make this an enviable mini-neighborhood. Existing uses can stay, but new uses can, by public and private cooperation, create a residential mixed-use enclave.

A small new open space can be developed in the center of the Brady Block, taking advantage of a small, approximately 80-foot-square BART-owned parcel that provides access to its tunnel below, and through purchase, an additional 100 foot by 80 foot parcel, currently surface parking. By creating a small open space here and connecting the existing alley network, the city would have created a magnificent centerpiece for this intimate mini-neighborhood. The park will be surrounded by several housing opportunity sites and would be accessed via a network of mid-block alleys designed as "living street" spaces, in accordance with policies for residential alleys outlined in Element 3. The BART vent shaft rather than a hinderance, could be the site of a central wind driven, kinetic sculpture.

In addition to the land use, height and bulk controls outlined in Element 1, the following actions are necessary to realize this change for the Brady Block, in order of importance:



Extensive street improvements and a new public open space are proposed for the interior of the Brady Block and surrounding streets.

- An agreement will be necessary with BART to allow the reuse of the land where its ventilation shafts comes to the surface as a public park.
- Parcels 3505031 and 3505031A, which are currently used as surface parking lots, will have to be purchased and dedicated to the Recreation and Parks Department as public open space.
- Parcel 3505029, which is currently vacant, will have to be purchased and dedicated to DPW as a public right-of-way connecting Stevenson Alley with Colton and Colusa Alleys.
- Approximately 4,000 sf. of parcel 3505035, which is currently a surface parking lot, will have to be purchased and dedicated to DPW as a public right-of-way connecting the two disconnected halves of Stevenson Alley.

Policy 7.2.6**Redesign 12th Street between Market and Mission to recapture space for pedestrian use.**

Twelfth Street, like McCoppin Street, in particular, has more space by far devoted to autos and parking than is necessary. Reconfiguring Twelfth Street to provide only one lane in each direction, plus parking lanes, and concentrating a widened pedestrian realm on one side of the street for walkers, sitting, even recreation and gardens, can turn it into positive, useful spaces for those who live and work along it.

Policy 7.2.7

Reconfigure major intersections to make them safer for vehicles and pedestrians alike, to facilitate traffic movement, and to take advantage of opportunities to create public spaces.

Van Ness Avenue and Mission/Otis Streets

Six streets come together at this intersection. There is a vast paved area that is without relief and is daunting for pedestrians, transit riders, and drivers alike.

Regularizing 12th Street's intersection with South Van Ness Avenue creates the space for a new, large corner plaza. Reorganizing vehicular travel lanes and the creation of the transitway north of the intersection permits much wider sidewalks at all the corners, as well as refuges for pedestrians crossing the street. In all, this can be a much safer, less daunting intersection than is the case currently.

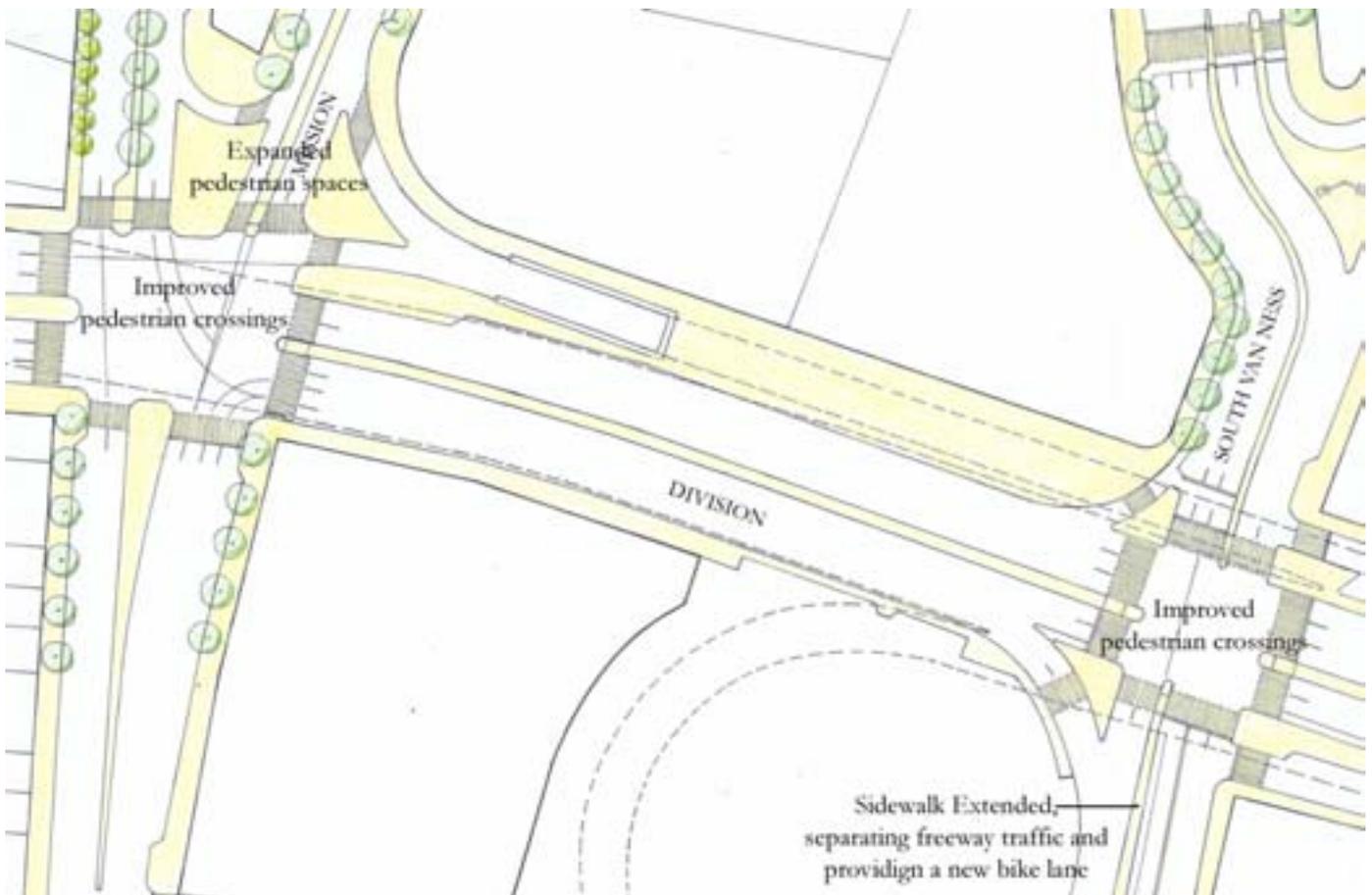


Improvements proposed for the intersection of South Van Ness Avenue and Mission Street.

Division Street at Mission Street and at South Van Ness Avenue

Large volumes of freeway-bound traffic move through these two intersections to get to the freeway on-ramp. Pedestrian crossings are daunting, if not impossible, and cyclists find these intersections particularly difficult, mostly because of the freeway-bound traffic. Small traffic islands, weaving traffic lanes, and discontinuous sidewalks truly leave pedestrians and bicyclists lost in a sea of traffic.

Improvement here starts with a new configuration of lanes that makes the transition from Mission Street and South Van Ness Avenue to the freeway ramp more direct, and minimizes conflicts with pedestrians. Pedestrian spaces are expanded and auto turning movements are regularized to the fullest extent. An extended sidewalk along South Van Ness Avenue south of Division Street connects pedestrians and separates freeway from local traffic, creating an easy and safe transition for cyclists moving south.



Street improvements proposed for the Mission Street and South Van Ness Avenue intersections with Division Street.