

GATEWAY TO THE CIVIC CENTER

# United Nations Plaza Renovation

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## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

*Prepared for the San Francisco Board of Supervisors' UN Plaza Working Group  
by ROMA Design Group and the San Francisco Department of Public Works*

MARCH 17, 2003

City and County of San Francisco



United Nations Plaza  
Working Group

Willie Lewis Brown, Jr., Mayor

March 18, 2003

The Honorable Matt Gonzalez  
President  
San Francisco Board of Supervisors  
City Hall Room 244  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102-4689

Dear President Matt Gonzalez and Honorable Board Members:


I am enclosing a report entitled "Gateway to the Civic Center: United Nations Plaza Renovation", a presentation of findings, on behalf of the United Nations Plaza Working Group that was formed at your behest.

As you know, the Working Group is comprised of fifteen individuals who represent city agencies, neighborhood associations, advocacy groups, tenants and City agencies. I have acted as Chair of the Working Group, with Richard Allman of the Tenderloin Sidewalk Improvement Program as Vice-Chair. Input on design matters was provided by ROMA Design Group, working in collaboration with landscape architects from the Department of Public Works (DPW).

With your endorsement, Judi Mosqueda, Project Manager with DPW, will take the plans that formed the basis for this report for review by the Planning and Art Commissions, and funding agencies. Construction documents will then be prepared based on the design concepts, with the expectation that bidding and construction will take place by or in early 2004, with completion likely by Fall 2004. Upon completion of Phase 1, DPW will pursue potential funding sources to implement Phase 2 improvements.

The Working Group members and I are available to meet with you to address any of your questions or concerns. I can be contacted by phone at 362-2500 or by email at: [msadv@pacbell.net](mailto:msadv@pacbell.net). Judi Mosqueda can be contacted by phone at 558-4039 or by email at: [judi\\_mosqueda@ci.sf.ca.us](mailto:judi_mosqueda@ci.sf.ca.us).

Sincerely,

  
Lynn Valente  
Chair

Enclosure: as noted

c: Edwin M. Lee / Harlan L. Kelly, Jr. / James Chia / UN Plaza Working Group Members

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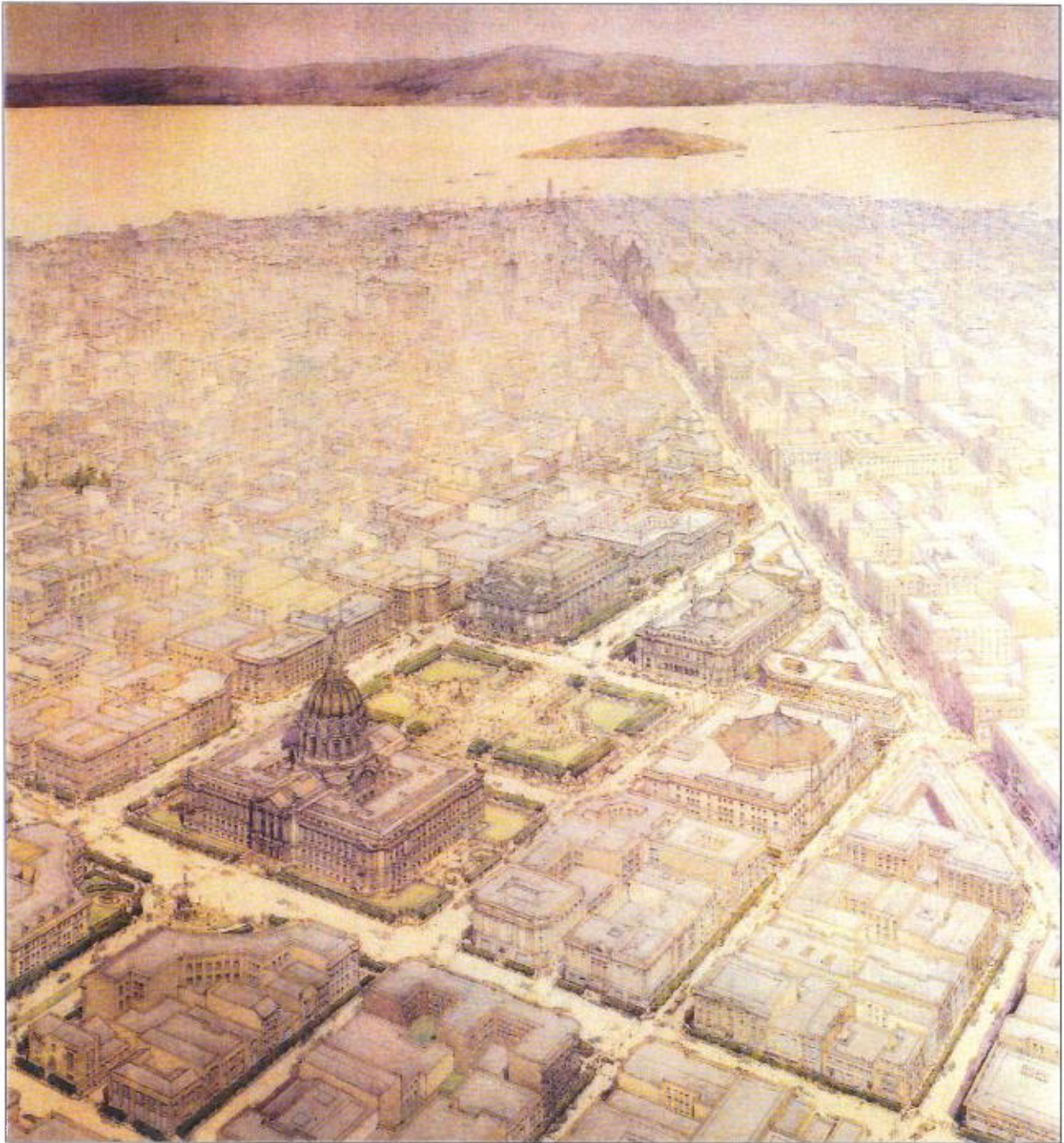
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*The aerial perspective from the southwest by Jules Guerin depicting the 1912 Civic Center plan illustrates the Beaux Arts concept of linking City Hall along Fulton Street and Market Street to the Ferry Building and waterfront beyond.*

## DESIGN APPROACH

The ability to create sustainable public space is a significant issue of concern to cities throughout the United States. While successful public space is an essential element to achieving the quality of life which makes cities great, negative public space is detrimental to their livability and appeal. If the only way a public space can be attractive to a community is through ever-increasing levels of maintenance, surveillance and programming, then some reconsideration of its physical characteristics must be undertaken. Successful public spaces create a dynamic balance with the activities they support, are attractive to a broad segment of the population and are ultimately self-regulating, instilling a pride of place and meaning for neighborhood and citywide residents and visitors.

The Civic Center was established after the 1906 earthquake as part of the effort to rebuild San Francisco. The new City Hall, which was destroyed during the earthquake, was rebuilt with grandeur and civic pride on axis with Fulton Street. Fulton Street was envisioned as a boulevard which, along with Market Street, would link City Hall to the Ferry Building, heightening the relationship between the City's two most significant landmarks. With the relocation of City Hall to Van Ness Avenue, Leavenworth and Hyde Streets could be and were extended to connect with Market Street.

Typical of Beaux-Arts design intentions, the monumental scale of the Civic Center public spaces established visual prominence and lent symbolic meaning to the role of local government in the city. However, even with the later addition of a significant component of cultural facilities, a pattern of meaningful activities on a daily basis were not established in Civic Center Plaza nor in the adjacent public spaces. Furthermore, the redesign of Civic Center Plaza in the 1960's diminished the role of Fulton Street as a ceremonial movement corridor from Market Street to City Hall.

The Market Street improvements in the 1970's added large areas to the already over-abundant supply of open space in the Civic Center area. Fulton Street and Leavenworth Street were closed to automobile traffic to create a 2.6-acre plaza. The plaza was paved in brick to match the adjacent Market Street and included a large fountain, lighting pylons, and lawn areas planted with London Plane trees and Lombardy Poplars. In 1995, symbolic elements were provided to commemorate the United Nations but, to the greatest extent, the open space did not contribute to the creation of meaningful activities. Over the years, the plaza has not achieved its full potential as a vibrant open space and destination for residents and visitors.

In United Nations Plaza today, due to the dedicated effort of a number of individuals, there are a number of programmed activities that take place on a periodic basis and which enliven the public



spaces. The most successful of these is the "Heart of the City" farmer's market on Wednesdays and Sundays; the Thursday Showcase and the "People in Plazas" lunchtime concert series during summer months. However, the daily life of the plaza, when events are not scheduled, is woefully lacking due in part to the overwhelming presence of drug dealers, drug users and gangs. The day and nighttime environment does not instill a sense of security and comfort. Drug paraphernalia and human waste can be found throughout the plaza, posing safety and health concerns. Today, the continual presence of police cars and maintenance vehicles is required to maintain civility during significant portions of the day and night. The quality of the environment has deteriorated to the point where transit patrons avoid the use of the adjacent BART station, and people moving through the area go out of their way not to walk through the plaza. Although physical commemorative elements exist, the life of the plaza does not reflect the values of peaceful coexistence and human rights that are the cornerstone of the United Nations, for which it was named.

The city's specific concerns about the sustainability of United Nations Plaza and the need to enhance its role as a public open space made it the focus of concern to City departments and the target for change and improvement. The evaluation of UN Plaza began in 1994 when it was included in the Civic Center Study, Draft for Citizen Review by the Department of City Planning. In 1999, DPW prepared a site assessment of the plaza, concluding that its vitality and physical form should be improved significantly. In 2000, a large (\$936,000) grant was secured from FHWA's Transportation and Communities and Systems Planning grant program to undertake transit-related pedestrian improvements to the plaza. The intent was not to utilize these funds to wholly redesign the plaza, but rather to evaluate how strategic improvements could be made which would enhance its sustainability and viability as well as its commemorative role. Towards this end, a Working Group was established by the Board of Supervisors comprised of fifteen individuals, representing city agencies, neighborhood associations, advocacy groups, tenants and city agencies, to ensure that consideration is given both to neighborhood and citywide interests. Professional input on design matters was provided by ROMA Design Group assisted by the Department of Public Works landscape architecture section.

In discussions with the Working Group and the designers, several physical characteristics of the existing environment were identified as problematic and not contributing to the viability of the plaza as a public gathering space. The principal issue is that a number of the physical changes which were implemented as part of the original design of the United Nations Plaza are not appropriate and do not contribute in a positive manner to its viability. In fact, some are detrimental to its health and well-being. From the broadest point of view, it is questionable whether it was appropriate to locate a plaza of this size and scale in the area. However, a comprehensive reevaluation of the plaza is not a part of this current design effort. Rather, the primary focus is on strategic improvements that address the lack of a human scale and the discontinuity and fragmentation that exists in the urban pattern.



*Fulton Street, 1935.*

The major problem is that the plaza is too big, is isolated from surrounding areas, and does not have surrounding activities which add to the daily pulse of life. From a human scale and activity point of view, the size of United Nations Plaza is not fitted with the level of activities that can be supported there on a regular basis. Fulton Street, at 160 feet, is wider than Market Street, and has none of its vehicular or transit functions nor its adjacent retail uses. The 2.6 acre plaza is larger than Union Square, but does not have the surrounding concentration of retail activity which might warrant its size. Adjacent buildings don't contribute to the life of the plaza. Blank walls and the lack of building entries and ground floor uses do little to generate activity and therefore put a much greater burden on the physical structure of the space itself and the elements within it. Common daily flows of activity, such as the movement of people, the transfer from one transportation mode to another, stopping for goods and services, buying a newspaper, getting shoes shined, picking up groceries, all energize a city and contribute to numerous social interactions that make people feel a part of a place.





### *Existing Conditions*



More specifically, the following physical characteristics were identified as having detrimental effects on the viability of United Nations Plaza as a public space:

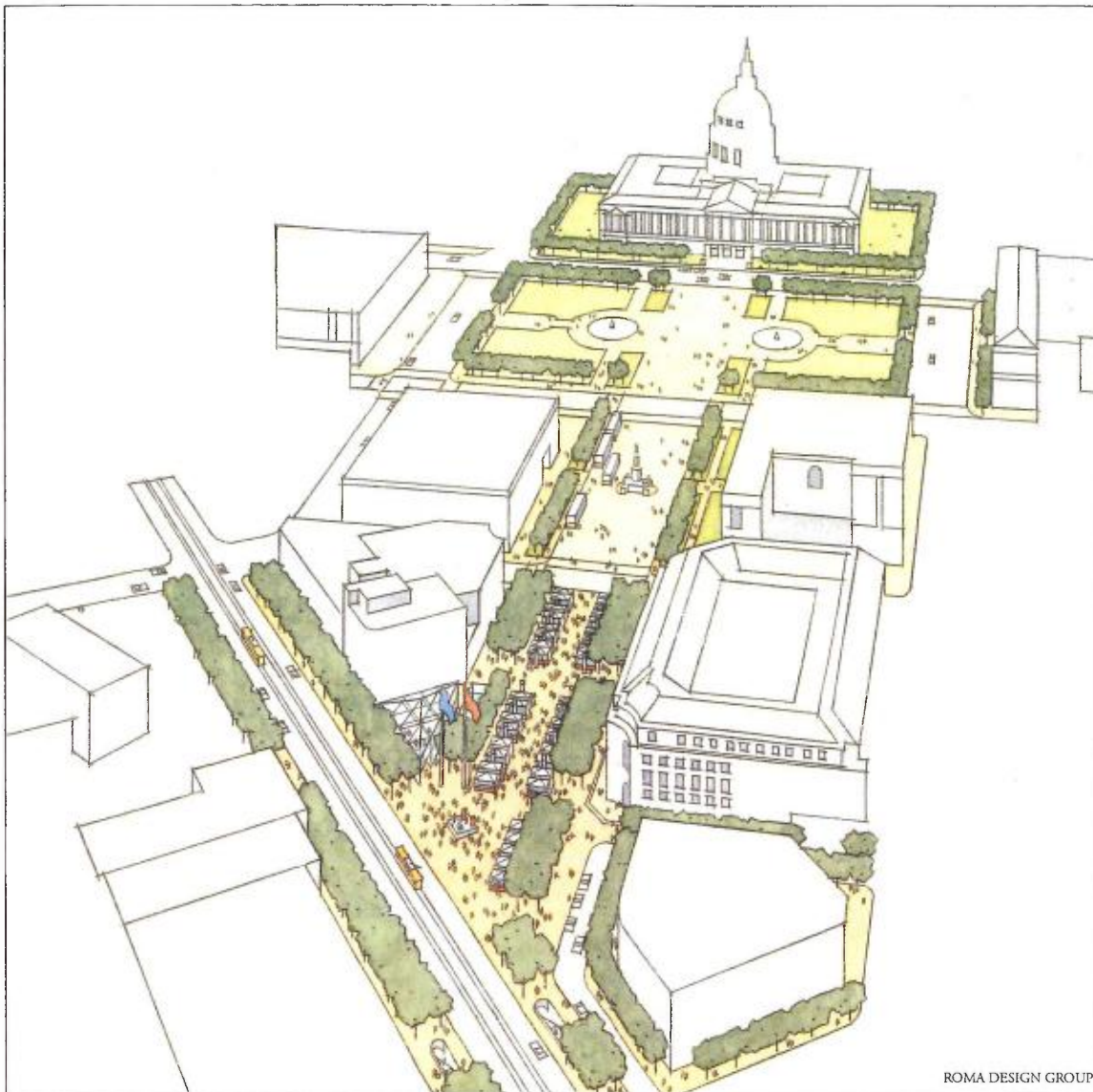
- Rather than enhancing the role of Fulton Street, the creation of a plaza at the intersection with Market Street actually diminished the Beaux Arts intentions to connect the Civic Center with Market Street and by extension to the Ferry Building. Further it tended to isolate the programmed events within Fulton Street from Market Street. The closure of Fulton Street undermined its role as a gateway and arrival into the Civic Center.
- The large pedestrian areas, particularly adjacent to the BART entrances eliminated opportunities for drop-off and pick-up by transit, taxis and other modes which would enhance the viability of transit to serve a broader market. In this manner, they further diminished the opportunity for the common everyday activities that serve to enliven a place and make the station areas feel more secure.
- The placement of the fountain adjacent to the Leavenworth corridor created a “backside” to the plaza and eliminated an essential connection for the neighborhood. The walls of the adjacent buildings further diminished the role of Leavenworth as a connection to the adjacent neighborhood, and exacerbated the accumulation of trash and garbage in and around the fountain area.
- The use of the terminus of Leavenworth Street as a service corridor providing vehicular access only to the federal building without a designated pedestrian pathway diminishes the role of the street as a linking element and contributes to the sense of isolation between the neighborhoods to the north and the plaza.
- The placement of the Simon Bolivar statue in the center of Fulton Street does not contribute to the visual and physical linkage to City Hall.
- The high light levels on the illuminated pylons along Fulton Street create glare and contrast and the implicit message that this is not a safe area to be in at night.
- The parterres of green grass interrupt flows of pedestrian movement and limit the space for markets and other events.
- The grassy berm and chasm-like quality of the central BART station entrance does not create an attractive appearance. Rather than providing continuity to activity, the grassy berm creates buffers to the BART entrance and further isolate it from the surrounding plaza.

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

In consideration of the identified problems and issues, the Working Group established a series of principles in May 2002 to provide further guidance to the design process. These are as follows:

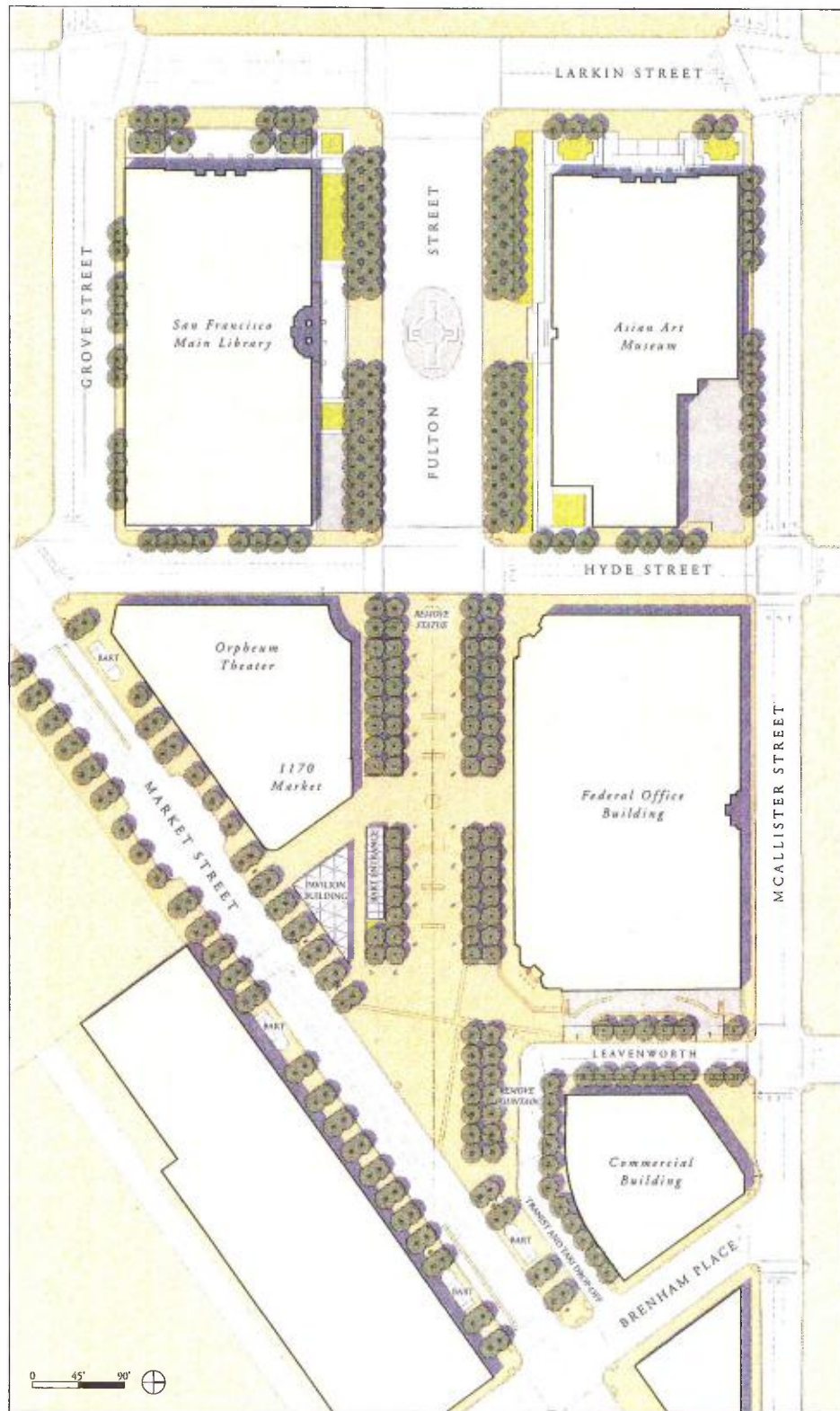
1. *Heighten the sense of place and identity in United Nations Plaza and its visibility from Market Street*
2. *Create an inclusive space that better fulfills its civic, commemorative and neighborhood roles.*
3. *Create a more equitable place that serves the diversity of the population in a sustainable manner.*
4. *Create a more flexible space that can accommodate daily activities and special events but does not require excessive programming to be successful.*
5. *Create a space that responds to and improves, wherever possible, the relationship to existing building edges and which can adapt as changes and improvements occur over time.*
6. *Enhance the relationship of the space, both visually and physically, to adjacent areas.*
7. *Make more legible the role of Fulton Street as the gateway to the Civic Center from Market Street.*
8. *Remove the fountain and the barrier walls that turn their back to Leavenworth Street.*
9. *Support and enhance the Farmer's Market, which is one of the most successful activities within the plaza.*
10. *Retain and enhance the commemorative elements and, if necessary, relocate them to better fit the redesign.*
11. *Create a better balance between moving and staying functions.*
12. *Reduce the sea of brick and utilize changes in paving materials to clarify the structure of the space.*
13. *Create visual cues that clarify pathways through the space and connections to adjacent areas.*
14. *Enhance pedestrian and bicycle circulation through the area.*
15. *Enhance multimodal transit access to the area.*
16. *Create more inviting entrances to the BART/Muni system below, and better connections to transit above.*
17. *Provide benches and seating areas in appropriate locations.*
18. *Promote retail or active ground level uses in the commercial buildings near the plaza.*





*The proposed concept strengthens the role of Fulton Street as the gateway to the Civic Center.*

19. *Create balanced night-time light levels and reduce the glaring effect of over-lighting while enhancing the clarity and perceived sense of security of those using the area.*
20. *Consider the addition of a taxi stand, van pool or shuttle drop-off area adjacent to the BART entrance.*
21. *Consider kiosks or pavilion buildings that can enhance activities and give better definition to open space areas.*
22. *Consider the addition of a staffed information kiosk and a system of directional and interpretative signage.*
23. *Consider the addition of shoeshine stands, news kiosks and other functions that add to the daily life of the plaza.*



*Illustrative Plan*



## IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

The program of improvements for UN Plaza is comprised of two phases to facilitate implementation. Phase 1 is currently funded. Phase 2 funding will be sought by DPW from State and Federal sources following the completion of Phase 1.

The Phase 1 Improvement Program for UN Plaza includes the following elements:

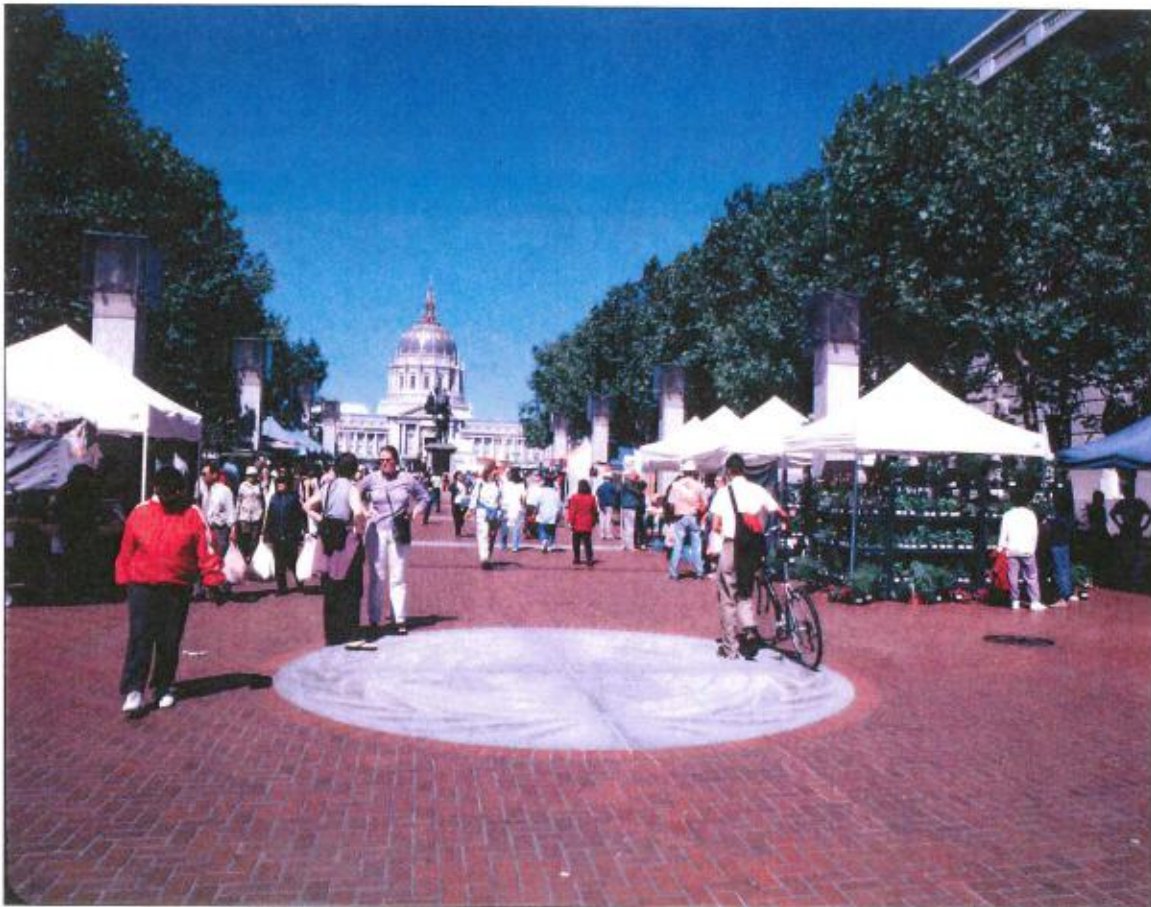
1. The elimination of the fountain and the walls which currently block access to Leavenworth Street.
2. The extension of plaza trees to give greater spatial structure and connection to Fulton Street and a stronger connection to Market Street.
3. The segregation of pedestrian and vehicular movement at the terminus of Leavenworth Street and the provision of a transit and taxi drop-off area adjacent to the easterly BART station and #10 UN Plaza.
4. Off-site relocation of the Simon Bolivar statue, which is now on axis with City Hall.
5. Modifications to the pylon light fixtures on Fulton Street to create improved visual qualities.
6. The addition of light fixtures along Leavenworth Street's newly created sidewalks adjacent to #10 UN Plaza.

The Phase 2 Improvement Program for UN Plaza includes the following elements:

1. Elimination of the grassy mound and walls adjacent to the central BART station entrance and contribution of a pavilion, in a public/private partnership, which will provide for activities that contribute to the life of the plaza and create a more humanizing environment for the BART entrance.
2. Placement of a significant commemorative element to honor the United Nations in its pursuit of human rights and peaceful co-existence near the intersection of Fulton and Market Streets.
3. Renovation of grassy parterres under the trees with enhanced paved areas.
4. Provision of movable chairs and a movable stage for performances, with permanent kiosks to add another layer of activities. The intention here would be that the tenants of the kiosks would manage street furniture.

## NEXT STEPS

This program has been guided by the significant efforts of the Working Group, which has expanded the concerns beyond those of a citywide scale to a local neighborhood and district scale. With the endorsement of the Board, the plans will go to the Planning Commission and the Art Commission for concurrence and to the funding agency for conformance with funding criteria. Construction documents will be prepared, based upon the design concepts, with the expectation that bidding and construction can proceed by early 2004, with completion likely by Fall of that year. Upon completion of Phase 1, DPW will pursue potential funding sources for the implementation of Phase 2 improvements.



*The farmer's market is one of the most successful activities that currently takes place in UN Plaza.*



**UN PLAZA RENOVATION**  
**Preliminary Budget Estimate**

**PHASE 1**

No.	Item	Quantity	Unit	Cost	Subtotal	Total
	<b>Demolition</b>					
1	Remove Fountain	1	Allow	50,000	50,000	
2	Remove Wall at Federal Building	25	LF	200	5,000	
3	Remove Trees	11	EA	700	7,700	
4	Remove Curbing/Set Flush	42	LF	100	4,200	
5	Remove Existing Brick and Sub-Slab	9,900	SF	3	29,700	
6	Remove 6" of Soil and Off-haul	185	CY	10	1,850	
7	Salvage Granite Curbs	270	LF	20	5,400	
8	Relocate Flagpole	1	EA	5,500	5,500	
9	Remove Simon Bolivar Monument	1	Allow	30,000	30,000	
						\$ 139,350
	<b>New Sitework</b>					
10	Street Paving	13,750	SF	8	110,000	
11	New Granite Curbs-8" Wide	950	LF	90	85,500	
12	New Brick Paving	8,200	SF	35	287,000	
13	New Trees	27	EA	850	22,950	
14	Utility Adjustments	1	Allow	15,000	15,000	
15	Brick Conform	1	Allow	10,000	10,000	
16	Drainage	1	Allow	10,000	10,000	
17	Irrigation	1	Allow	15,000	15,000	
18	Change Light Fixtures @ Columns	16	EA	2,500	40,000	
19	Lighting at Leavenworth/10 UN	5	EA	6,000	30,000	
						\$ 625,450
					<b>Subtotal</b>	\$ 764,800
					Mobilization (5%)	\$ 38,240
					Contingency (15%)	\$ 114,720
					<b>Total</b>	\$ 917,760

**PHASE 2**

No.	Item	Quantity	Unit	Cost	Subtotal	Total
1	Commemorative Elements	1	Allow	500,000	500,000	
2	Permanent Kiosks	3	EA	125,000	375,000	
3	Portable Chairs and Storage	45	EA	1,000	45,000	
4	Remove Turf and Replace w/Pavers	12,000	SF	25	300,000	
5	Multi-use Café at Lawn/BART Zone	3,520	SF	500	1,760,000	
6	BART Entrance Cover	1,800	SF	300	540,000	
7	Additional Lighting	1	Allow	200,000	200,000	
8	Utilities/Misc. Adjustments	1	Allow	80,000	80,000	
9	Mural	1	Allow	25,000	25,000	
					<b>Subtotal</b>	\$ 3,825,000
					Mobilization (5%)	\$ 191,250
					Contingency (20%)	\$ 765,000
					<b>Total</b>	\$ 4,781,250





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Honorable Willie Lewis Brown, Jr., Mayor, City and County of San Francisco

The Honorable Matt Gonzalez, President, Board of Supervisors

The Honorable Chris Daly, Board of Supervisors, City and County of San Francisco, District #6

The UN Plaza Working Group is a panel appointed by the Members of the Board of Supervisors, City and County of San Francisco.

### **Working Group**

Lynn Valente, Chair

Richard Allman, Vice-Chair

Nancy Peterson

Mary Millman

Roderick Kiracofe

Terry Hogan

Paul Leaman

Christine Adams

Christopher Chow

James Armstrong

Carolyn Diamond

Gia Grant

Martha Ketterer

Robert McDonald

Mohammed Nuru

### **Affiliation**

Market Street Association

Tenderloin Sidewalk Improvement Program

United Nations Association

Thursday Showcase

Market Street Association

Tenderloin Resident

Community Housing Partnership

Heart of the City Farmers Market

Central City Hospitality House

DPW – BSES

Mid-Market PAC

SF Clean City Coalition

DPW – Landscape Architecture

Recreation and Park Department

DPW - Operations

### **Department of Public Works**

Edwin M. Lee, Director

Harlan L. Kelly, Jr., Deputy Director and City Engineer

Mohammed Nuru, Deputy Director of Operations

James Chia, Acting Assistant City Engineer

Judi Mosqueda, Project Manager

Martha Ketterer, Landscape Architect

### **ROMA Design Group**

Boris Dramov, FAIA, FAICP, Design Principal

Bonnie Fisher, ASLA, Landscape Principal

Mimi Ahn, Landscape Architect

Robert Holloway, Graphic Designer

Jim Leritz, Urban Designer





## APPENDIX

FILE NO. 011666

MOTION NO. M01-140

[United Nations Working Group.]

**Motion establishing a 15 member working group on United Nations Plaza.**

WHEREAS, United Nations Plaza is an extremely important open space for the City of San Francisco; now, therefore, be it moved, that the Board of Supervisors establishes a 15 member working group on United Nations Plaza, to be appointed as follows:

4 members appointed by the Director of Department of Public Works,

1 member appointed by the Director of Recreation & Parks Department,

2 members appointed by the Mayor, one of whom should be a member of the Mid-Market Redevelopment Project Area Committee,

8 members appointed by the Board of Supervisors, one of whom shall be a member of the United Nations Association, one of whom shall be a member of the Market Street Association, one of whom shall be residential tenant in the proximity of United Nations Plaza, one of whom shall be a vendor at the Farmer's Market held in United Nations Plaza, one of whom shall be a homeless advocate, and 3 of whom shall be a member of the public at large. and, be it

FURTHER MOVED, That the working group for United Nations Plaza Working Group will be responsible for reviewing all plans and documents for United Nations Plaza; making recommendations to Department of Public Works, and the Board of Supervisors, and shall approve a conceptual plan for United Nations Plaza; and, be it

FURTHER MOVED, That the working group shall make its first report to the Board of Supervisors by December 31, 2001.

SUPERVISOR CHRIS DALY  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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9/19/2001

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City and County of San Francisco

City Hall  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102-4689

Tails  
Motion

File Number: 011666

Date Passed: September 24, 2001

Motion establishing a 15 member working group on United Nations Plaza.

September 24, 2001 Board of Supervisors — APPROVED

Ayes: 10 - Ammiano, Daly, Gonzalez, Hall, Leno, Maxwell, McGoldrick,  
Newsom, Peskin, Yee  
Absent: 1 - Sandoval

File No. 011666

I hereby certify that the foregoing Motion  
was APPROVED on September 24, 2001 by  
the Board of Supervisors of the City and  
County of San Francisco.

  
Gloria L. Young  
Clerk of the Board

1 [Resolution authorizing the Director of Public Works to accept and expend federal grant  
2 funds totaling \$936,325 for improvements at Civic Center-United Nations Plazas/Mid-Market.]  
3

4 Resolution authorizing the Director of the Department of Public Works (DPW) to accept  
5 and expend \$936,325 in federal Transportation, Community and System Preservation  
6 (TCSP) funds for improvements in Civic Center-United Nations Plazas/Mid-Market.  
7

8 WHEREAS, The Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA21) (Public Law  
9 105-178, 112 Stat. 107 (1998)) created the Transportation and Community and System  
10 Preservation Pilot (TCSP) Program; and

11 WHEREAS, The TCSP program provides funding for grants and research to  
12 investigate and address the relationship between transportation and community and system  
13 preservation; and,

14 WHEREAS, Under the Department of Transportation and Related Appropriations Act,  
15 FY 2000 (Public Law 106-69, 113 Stat. 986 (1999)), the Congress authorized \$25 million for  
16 thirty-nine special projects and provided an additional \$10 million to the TCSP to fund FY 2000  
17 applications; and,

18 WHEREAS, The Department of Public Works was granted \$936,325 in TCSP funding  
19 by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for its Civic Center-United Nations Plaza/Mid-  
20 Market Improvements Project; and,

21 WHEREAS, The federal funding will cover all eligible costs as defined by FHWA and  
22 administered by the California Department of Transportation; and,

23 WHEREAS, Indirect costs are ineligible according to FHWA rules and regulations; now,  
24 therefore, be it  
25







## City and County of San Francisco

### Tails

### Resolution

City Hall  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102-4689

File Number: 011179

Date Passed:

Resolution authorizing the Director of the Department of Public Works (DPW) to accept and expend \$936,325 in federal Transportation, Community and System Preservation (TCSP) funds for improvements in Civic Center-United Nations Plazas/Mid-Market.

August 27, 2001 Board of Supervisors — CONTINUED

Ayes: 10 - Ammiano, Daly, Gonzalez, Hall, Leno, Maxwell, McGoldrick, Peskin, Sandoval, Yee  
Absent: 1 - Newsom

September 17, 2001 Board of Supervisors — CONTINUED

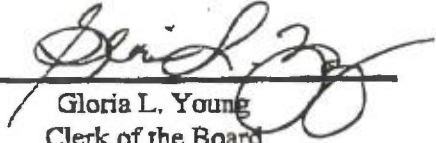
Ayes: 9 - Ammiano, Daly, Gonzalez, Hall, Leno, Maxwell, McGoldrick, Newsom, Yee  
Absent: 2 - Peskin, Sandoval

September 24, 2001 Board of Supervisors — ADOPTED

Ayes: 10 - Ammiano, Daly, Gonzalez, Hall, Leno, Maxwell, McGoldrick, Newsom, Peskin, Yee  
Absent: 1 - Sandoval

File No. 011179

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution  
was ADOPTED on September 24, 2001 by the  
Board of Supervisors of the City and County  
of San Francisco.

  
Gloria L. Young  
Clerk of the Board

OCT 05 2001

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Date Approved

  
Mayor Willie L. Brown Jr.