Public Space + Public Life in Civic Center

San Francisco 2018

Public Space Public Life Survey
Key Findings and a
Framework for Public Life
Gehl in collaboration with San Francisco Planning conducted a Public Space + Public Life Study of Civic Center in Summer 2017.

The Study sets a baseline for life and space in the Civic Center district. This baseline allows the City to identify challenges and opportunities to amplify public life in Civic Center.

It also allows the City to measure progress towards target public life outcomes during interim activation events and future phases of physical improvements.

A strategic framework for amplifying public life in Civic Center also accompanies this document.

You can find more information about the Civic Center Public Space design here civiccentersf.org

You can find this document, and other Gehl projects here issuu.com/gehlarchitects/
Survey Volunteers

Robin Abad
Christy Alexander
Svetha Ambati
Sririchon Boonprakob
Ryan Booth
Anne Brask
Iman Bright
Ben Caldwell
Joan Campos
Jenni Cen
Joanna Chan
Natalie Chyba
Liene Cikanovica
Jorgen Cleemann
Rucha Dande
Maria De Alva
Donna Dessart
Debbie Eng
Jackson Eng
Chris Escobedo
Lisa Fisher
John Francis
Julie Fukunaga
Manuela Galindo
Max Gara
Joan Gerigk
Ian Griffiths
Chris Guillard
Lauren Hackney
Jordan Harrison

Radha Hayagreev
Micah Hilt
Wendy Ho
Cassie Hoeprich
Ashley Hong
Seung Yen Hong
Maya Hovey
Neil Hrushowy
Bjorn Hubert-Wallander
Claude Imbault
Kyle James
Joann Kuo
Michelle Langlie
Lily Langlois
Kevin Lenhart
Kenneth Levy
Diane Livia
Jessica Look
Casey Lowdermilk
Bettina Mateo
Phoebe Meixner
Spencer Michael
Anna Misharina
Ella Morgulis
Willett Moss
Andrea Nelson
Jennifer Norris
Nineveh O’Connell
Claire Padien-Havens
Satyajit Pande

Sneha Parmar
Jeremy Patfield
Joe Peltier
Nick Perry
Jessica Prasad
Patrick Race
ilana Rainero-de Haan
Susannah Raub
Molly Riddle
Ilaria Salvadori
Emilie Schattman
Sibylle Scholz
Meg Wall Shui
Valentina Simi
Tara Singh
Brian Stokle
Mimi Tam
Rachael Tanner
Aileen Tat
Kansai Uchida
Kevin Utschig
Anush Venkatesan
Syd Wayman
Carla Wietgrefe
Peter Winch
Nico Wright
Melanie Yee
Yosef Yip
Public Life in Civic Center isn’t living up to its potential. The District’s grand architecture and ceremonial public spaces were designed to inspire awe and serve as ceremonial gathering spaces, not meet the needs of people who live or work nearby. Over decades, the few human-scale elements have been removed. There is too much empty public space in Civic Center, and too few invitations to be there.

Today, many of the people spending time in Civic Center’s public spaces have nowhere else to go. The effects of larger social issues like homelessness and drug use have become synonymous with the space. We can’t wait for these complex issues to be solved before we do something to improve public life.

Design alone cannot solve the challenges in Civic Center - but it can help. Civic Center’s public spaces deserve unique, compelling invitations that give more people a reason to be there. Programming, food, appealing landscape elements, and recreation facilities encourage people to come, and make people passing through feel welcome to stay.

Progress is only possible through a coordinated effort towards a common vision. Design, programming, social services, stewardship, and communications must work together for the kind of life we want to see in Civic Center.

It starts with a Framework for Public Life.
Is Civic Center living up to its name?

Civic Center

\textipa{\textipa{\textipa{\textipa{\textipa{si-vik}}} \textipa{\textipa{\textipa{\textipa{Adjective}}} \textipa{\textipa{1. Relating to a city or town, especially its administration; municipal.}} \textipa{\textipa{2. Relating to the duties or activities of people in relation to their town, city, or local area.}}}}}}

Origin: Mid 16th century: from French civique or Latin civicus, from civis ‘citizen’. The original use was in civic garland, crown, etc., translating Latin corona civica, denoting a garland of oak leaves and acorns given in ancient Rome to a person who saved a fellow citizen’s life.
Is Civic Center living up to its name?

Civic Center

/ˈsen-ter/
Noun
1. The point that is equally distant from every point on the circumference of a circle or sphere.
2. The point from which an activity or process is directed, or on which it is focused.
3. A place or group of buildings where a specified activity is concentrated.

Origin: Late Middle English: from Old French, or from Latin centrum, from Greek kentron ‘sharp point, stationary point of a pair of compasses’, related to kentein ‘to prick’.
Background + Context
Civic Center is ready for a change

The Civic Center district’s public realm is overdue for an update. Adjacent neighborhoods like the Tenderloin lack public space. The existing neighborhood’s need for high quality public space will only grow as people continue to move to the district, and as the area continues to grow as an arts and culture hub. The City has identified the transit-rich Hub district near Civic Center as a strategic area for more people to live in San Francisco.

These forces, past and present, have changed and will continue to change the demands people have on the public realm.

The most recent plan for the Civic Center’s public realm is nearly 20 years old.

Public Works-led “Civic Center Historic District Improvement Project” by SMWM and Olin Partnership.

Since the 1990s, the area has grown as both an arts and culture district and a residential neighborhood.

ACT Strand Theater
New construction
New growth at Market/VanNess
Civic Center Public Realm Plan Components

The Civic Center Public Realm Plan will create a unified vision for long-term improvements to Civic Center’s plazas, streets, and other public spaces.

The Plan is an inter-agency effort managed by San Francisco Planning and is part of the City’s ongoing efforts to improve the area as both a neighborhood gathering space and common area for everyone who lives in, works in and visits San Francisco.

More information about the plan can be found at www.civiccentersf.org
Guiding Question:

How can Civic Center continue to serve as one of the city’s primary civic and ceremonial gathering places while also providing a safe, comfortable and welcoming environment for everyday users?
Public Life Study: Putting people at the center of urban change

Public Life surveys have been performed around the globe by Gehl and partner cities. In some places, like Sydney and Copenhagen, Public Life data is an integrated part of the city planning process and is used to gauge success according to public life benchmarks. It is no coincidence that these cities are ranked as some of the world’s most liveable places. When cities use public life data to guide their design and policies, the outcome is better for people.

Download the Public Life Data Protocol: www.gehlinstitute.com

San Francisco uses public life surveys to inform the neighborhood planning process. Learn more here: sf-planning.org/public-space-and-public-life-studies
Decide the Everyday

Why a Public Space Public Life (PSPL) study?

To find human stories
To inform strategy and design
To provide evidence on which to base objective choices
To benchmark progress
To discover new opportunities
To create urgency for change

We come here for the opera - but we rush through Civic Center.

This is my neighborhood open space - Why are there so few public benches?
How and when to measure

A data-driven approach to amplifying public life in Civic Center

- The Public Space Public Life study of Civic Center informs an Evaluation Matrix that benchmarks key public life indicators (see part 4)
- Evaluate indicators during interim activation events, compare against baseline, and use to adjust strategic vision
- Perform spot-counts every 2-3 years
- Perform full public life study every 3-5 years
The Civic Center Commons Initiative can pilot concepts from the Public Realm Plan

Civic Center Commons has been bringing life to Civic Center’s key public spaces with free music, art, and activities. This study did not occur during a planned event, but these interim activations can test concepts from the Public Realm Plan, evaluate outcomes, and make recommendations for the long-term vision.

More information about Civic Center Commons at: www.civiccentercommons.org

Photos c/o Civic Center Commons + Groundplay SF
A city observes itself

Nearly 100 volunteers collected the data that makes up this report.

Numerous city agencies, budding urbanists, interested citizens, the Department of Public Health, Another Planet Entertainment, volunteers from the Opera, Stanford, Berkeley, and other educational institutions all participated. It was a citywide affair!
4 Snapshot Days + 2 spot-counts

There is no typical day at Civic Center. We selected four days that represented different common activity profiles and supplemented these counts with two spot-counts to capture specific conditions.

The survey ran from 8:00am to 8:00pm on each day unless noted.

**“Quiet” Weekend**
Saturday, June 10
Min 54°F Max 63°F Wind 4m/s

**“Busy” Weekday**
Thursday, June 7
Farmers’ Market @ UN Plaza, Warriors game at Civic Center
Min 52°F Max 59°F Wind 4m/s

**“Quiet” Weekend**
Saturday, June 10
Min 54°F Max 63°F Wind 4m/s

**“Busy” Weekend**
Saturday, May 27
Concert @ Bill Graham + Prom
Min 54°F Max 61°F Wind 2m/s
There is no typical day in Civic Center

From daily weddings and civic business to weekly farmer’s markets to annual regional gatherings like Pride and protests, Civic Center has many facets of its public life, impacted by events with varying character, size, and frequency.

The Public Life Study focused on events that happen in the daily and weekly rhythm.

The Civic Center Commons initiative activates Civic Center’s public realm with free music, art, and activities. This study did not occur during a planned event.

PSPL Survey
Measured everyday and weekly activities, as well as some monthly events.
Defining Civic Center

The Public Space and Public Life survey looked at the entire Civic Center District, which borders neighboring Hayes Valley, SoMa, Mid-market, Tenderloin, and Little Saigon neighborhoods. Findings and recommendations focus on five areas and the streets that connect them.

“The Commons” is used throughout this document to refer to the three public spaces that make up Civic Center’s grand axis.
Survey Locations

The Public Life survey count locations were selected to capture the ebb and flow of the public life of Civic Center, focused around its central public spaces.
Survey Methods

Age and Gender

Measuring people moving + spending time
Survey Methods

People Moving

Volumes of people walking and cycling
Survey Methods
People Spending Time

Body posture, activity, age, gender of people spending time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERSON OR GROUP GENDER</th>
<th>TOTALS:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-14 YEARS OLD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-4 YEARS OLD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| POSTURE ACTIVITIES OTHER ACTIVITIES NOTES |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| SITTING - PRIVATE / CAFES                | SITTING - PUBLIC SEATING                     |
| STANDING                                 | STANDING                                      |
| 65+ YEARS OLD                           | 65+ YEARS OLD                                 |
| 15-19 YEARS OLD                        | 15-19 YEARS OLD                               |
| FEMALE                                  | FEMALE                                        |
| IN A GROUP? (Y/N)                       | IN A GROUP? (Y/N)                             |

PROCEDURE:
Walk through the area indicated in red above to capture a snapshot of the stationary activities and age / gender of the people present in the public space.

Mark exact locations of people on the map using a number for each, starting with 1.

For each person, quickly 'X' the box that fits best in each category (age, gender, posture, activities).

If you reach 30, continue on to a new sheet and begin where you left off, starting with 1 again.

DATE: NAME: TIME:
Survey Methods
People Spending Time

Measuring how the space invites different body postures
Survey Methods
People Spending Time

Measuring how the space invites different activities
Measuring how the space invites activities like sleeping, drug use, and encampments

Working with SF Planning, Gehl created activity categories to capture less socially acceptable and illicit behaviors that are part of the area’s public life profile.

These activities were measured as a way of creating a common understanding of where, when, and how often these activities take place in the space.

Activity categories were standardized for ease of comparison, but do not capture all nuanced behavior observed in the spaces.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sleeping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping can be positive, but it can also be a manifestation of larger societal issues.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aggressive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shouting, confrontation, or other aggressive behavior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panhandling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asking for money or donations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Encamped</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accompanied by numerous personal belongings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hard Drugs / Intoxicated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actively using drugs, or clearly incapacitated by them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey Methods

**Intercept Survey**

Asking questions about sentiment, habits of use, demographics, and other elements not captured with observation.

The Intercept Survey was taken by 419 people, from a total of 966 people who were approached.
Survey Methods

Public Space Analysis

To understand the relationship between public life and public space we performed the following analysis:

- 12 Urban Quality Criteria analysis
- Facade Quality Analysis
- Land use Analysis
- Neighborhood Amenity Mapping
- Public Space Amenity Mapping
- Test walks