

CIVIC CENTER PUBLIC REALM PLAN

FINAL PLAN - MARCH 2025

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CHAPTER 1
PLAN OVERVIEW



A Community Vision to Guide Recovery in the Civic Heart of San Francisco

The Civic Center Public Realm Plan sets forth an inclusive, community-generated vision for capital improvements to Civic Center's public spaces. The Plan emphasizes providing open space for the Tenderloin and Mid-Market communities, and acknowledging its citywide importance as a civic public space.

The Plan is grounded in robust community engagement. Between 2017 and 2019 the project team embedded themselves in the community to engage in meaningful dialog about Civic Center's past, present and future. Over 90 community organizations and 3,000 people participated in the planning process. Their vision is expressed in the principles, goals, and concept designs in the pages ahead.

The vision is a bold one, and became more relevant as the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of equitable access to quality open spaces that are amenity-rich, healthy and safe. To provide much-needed open space for neighbors and a welcoming civic district in the heart of San Francisco, the Plan calls for a major public space improvement project. Highlights include:

- The **addition of baseline services and amenities** such as restrooms, water fountains, and seating;
- **Upgrades to UN Plaza** to better support markets and other outdoor programming, today and in the future;
- **New plantings, lawns, central gathering space, and kiosks in Civic Center Plaza** to complement the successful Helen Diller Civic Center Playgrounds and cafe kiosk; and
- **Transformation of Fulton Street into a flexible public space** to meet community needs.
- Transform Grove Street into a walkable **Culture Connector**.

While these upgrades cannot be implemented all at once, the design vision in this Plan provides a road map and framework for specific investments within the public realm.









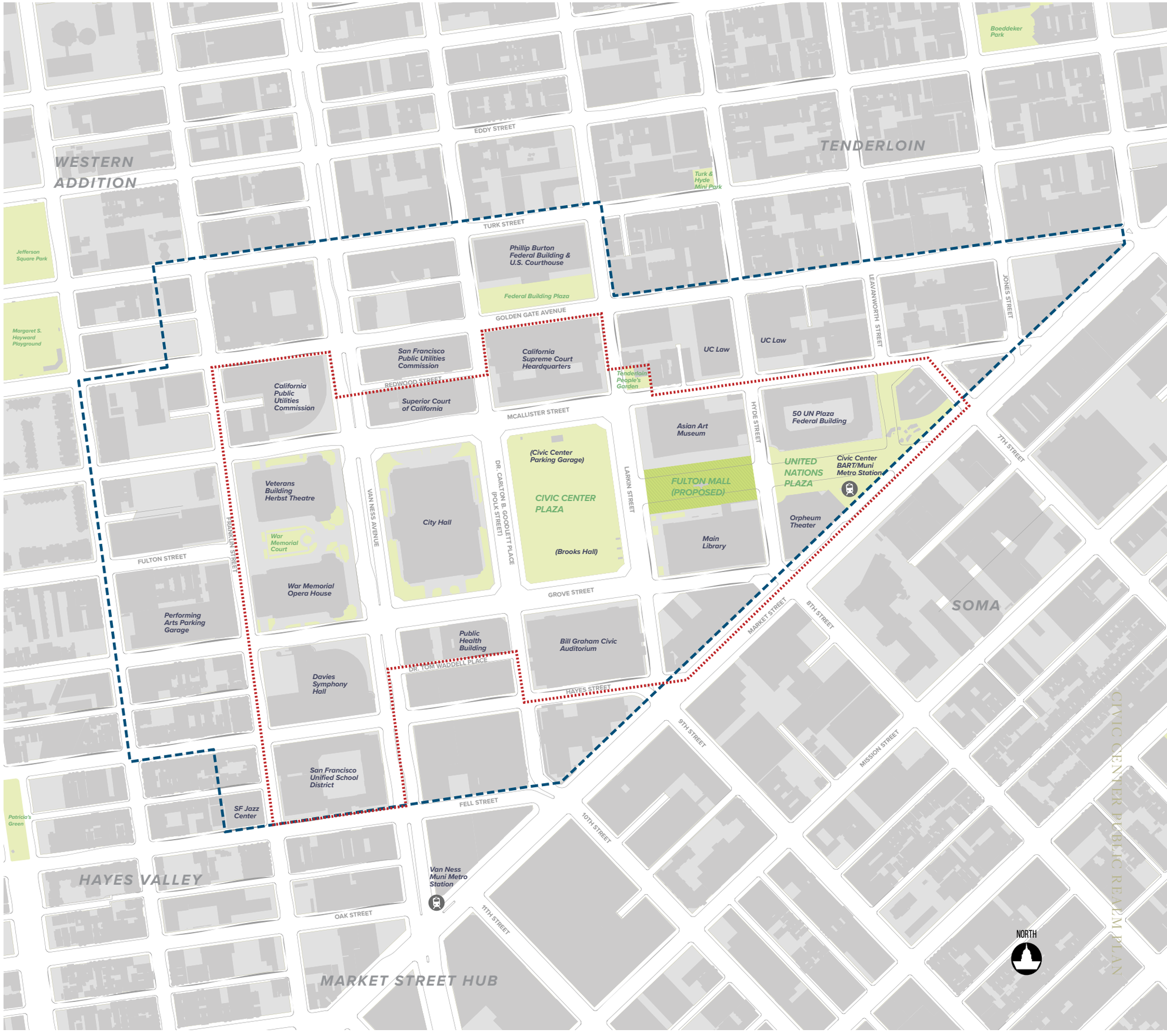
The Plan has been built with the community over multiple years of deep engagement, conversation and collaboration.

PLAN AREA

The Civic Center Public Realm Plan area is generally bounded by Gough Street, Golden Gate Avenue, Market Street and Fell Street and encompasses the San Francisco Civic Center Landmark District. The Plan boundaries extend a block beyond the core of Civic Center to connect the district to surrounding neighborhoods.



- Public Realm Plan Area
- Landmark District Boundary
- Public Open Space
- Proposed Open Space
- Building Footprint
- City Block



Background

CIVIC CENTER'S PUBLIC REALM

Civic Center is the civic and cultural heart of San Francisco. It is the city's preeminent public place and is one of the city's most prominent historic districts. For over 100 years, it has been the site of cultural celebrations, demonstrations, and historic events.

Civic Center's public realm–its streets, plazas, and other public spaces–shape how people experience the area, and the public realm takes on even greater significance due to the Civic Center's role as a place where thousands of people frequently gather for marches, protests, celebrations and other events of citywide–and sometimes national–significance.

Civic Center's public spaces were deliberately designed over a century ago with their role as a stage for large gatherings in mind. In recent decades, its public spaces have also taken on the critical role of neighborhood open space for the surrounding residential neighborhoods, home to large populations of lower-income families with relatively little access to open space.

This Plan is a vision that will serve neighborhoods in need of safe, attractive open spaces, while also improving the core of Civic Center into a celebrated gathering place for all San Franciscans and the entire Bay Area.

PLAN ORIGINS

When the Plan was conceptualized in 2016, Civic Center's growing resident and worker population, combined with the existing population in the Tenderloin, SoMa, and other nearby neighborhoods, were placing increased demands on the area's streets and public spaces. Civic Center's public spaces represent a significant land area in the neighborhood, but they were not inviting enough for everyday use and offered few reasons to linger when large events were not happening. Basic amenities such as seating and restrooms were missing. While near-term efforts and investments, such as the Helen Diller Civic Center Playgrounds, were beginning to remedy these issues, the City lacked a contemporary vision to ensure that public realm design, operations, and management were well-coordinated and aligned with community priorities.

The Planning Department, along with an inter-agency City and consultant team, began work on the Plan in 2017. The project team worked with community stakeholders to create a unified vision for the area's public spaces and released draft concept designs in February 2019. With the need for public space only growing during the COVID-19 pandemic, the City remains committed to advancing the design improvements envisioned through this community process.

PUBLIC REALM INITIATIVES

The Civic Center Public Realm Plan is closely coordinated with the Civic Center Initiative, a collaborative effort between the City, local community organizations, and cultural institutions to bring new amenities and improved stewardship to the district's central civic spaces in the near term. The Initiative launched in 2015 and ran through 2020, focused on bringing amenities, attractions, and improved stewardship to Civic Center's three linked public spaces: Civic Center Plaza, United Nations Plaza, and Fulton Street. Initially launched by the City of San Francisco, the Initiative is now spearheaded by the Civic Center Community Benefit District (CBD), whose boundaries were adjusted in July of 2019 to include all three public spaces.

The Initiative's near-term projects have worked to address the shortcomings of Civic Center's public realm and provided lessons learned to inform the design concepts in the Public Realm Plan. In turn, the CBD and City Agencies have begun to prototype and implement design concepts advanced by the Plan as partnerships and opportunities arise. This includes the Leavenworth Dog Park, which was a top community priority of the Plan, as well as the activation and programming being led by the Recreation and Parks Department in all three public spaces, with a focus on UN Plaza.



The core of Civic Center's public realm–Civic Center Plaza, Fulton Street, and United Nations Plaza–as seen from the dome of City Hall.



The Public Realm Plan builds off momentum of recent investments like the Helen Diller Civic Center Playgrounds.



One of many events led by the Civic Center Initiative included recurring block parties, featuring food, music, games, street sports, dancing, and other free activations.

Community Engagement

The Public Realm Plan is grounded in robust community engagement and input. It strives to create an inclusive, community-generated vision for the district's public spaces and streets. Between 2017 and 2019 the project team embedded themselves in the Civic Center community to engage in meaningful dialog about the past, present and future of Civic Center's streets and public spaces. Over 90 community organizations and 3,000 people have participated in the planning process to-date. Their vision is expressed in the principles, goals, and concept designs contained within this Plan.



Civic Center Stories

In the summers of 2016 and 2017, planners engaged with people in Civic Center's public spaces and, with their consent, combined their stories, in their own words, with photographic portraits to help bring a human face to the diverse communities who spend time in Civic Center. The resulting Civic Center Stories booklets and website has helped document the public's sentiments, criticisms, and relationships to Civic Center. Excerpts can be found throughout this Plan, and all the stories are available online at: civiccentersf.org/civic-center-stories



Community Working Group

A Community Working Group for the project was established to ensure broad and balanced representation from a diverse team of local residents, to inform the design process and to maintain an open communication channel between the project team and the communities served by the Civic Center redesign. Working group members served as community ambassadors, acting as sounding boards for new ideas, and communicated updates about the project and upcoming events to their respective communities.



Multi-Lingual & Youth Focus Groups

To hear the perspectives of those sometimes underrepresented at City outreach events, the project team worked with InterEthnica to conduct in-language focus group discussions with members of the local Vietnamese, Chinese, and Latinx communities. A special Youth Focus Group (ages 13-17) was also conducted. Focus groups meetings took place in fall 2017 and are summarized in a Focus Group Report. The results of the focus group discussions greatly informed the concepts created by the project team.



Community Surveys

The Plan's development included three major community survey periods. In summer 2017 over 400 on-site surveys were collected to gather community perspectives on existing conditions. In November 2017, 280 in-person surveys (66% non-English) and over 2,000 online surveys were collected to gather feedback on initial design ideas. In April 2018, approximately 200 in-person surveys (~50% non-English) and over 800 online survey were collected to gather feedback on initial framework plans for Civic Center's plazas and streets.



Mobile Outreach Station

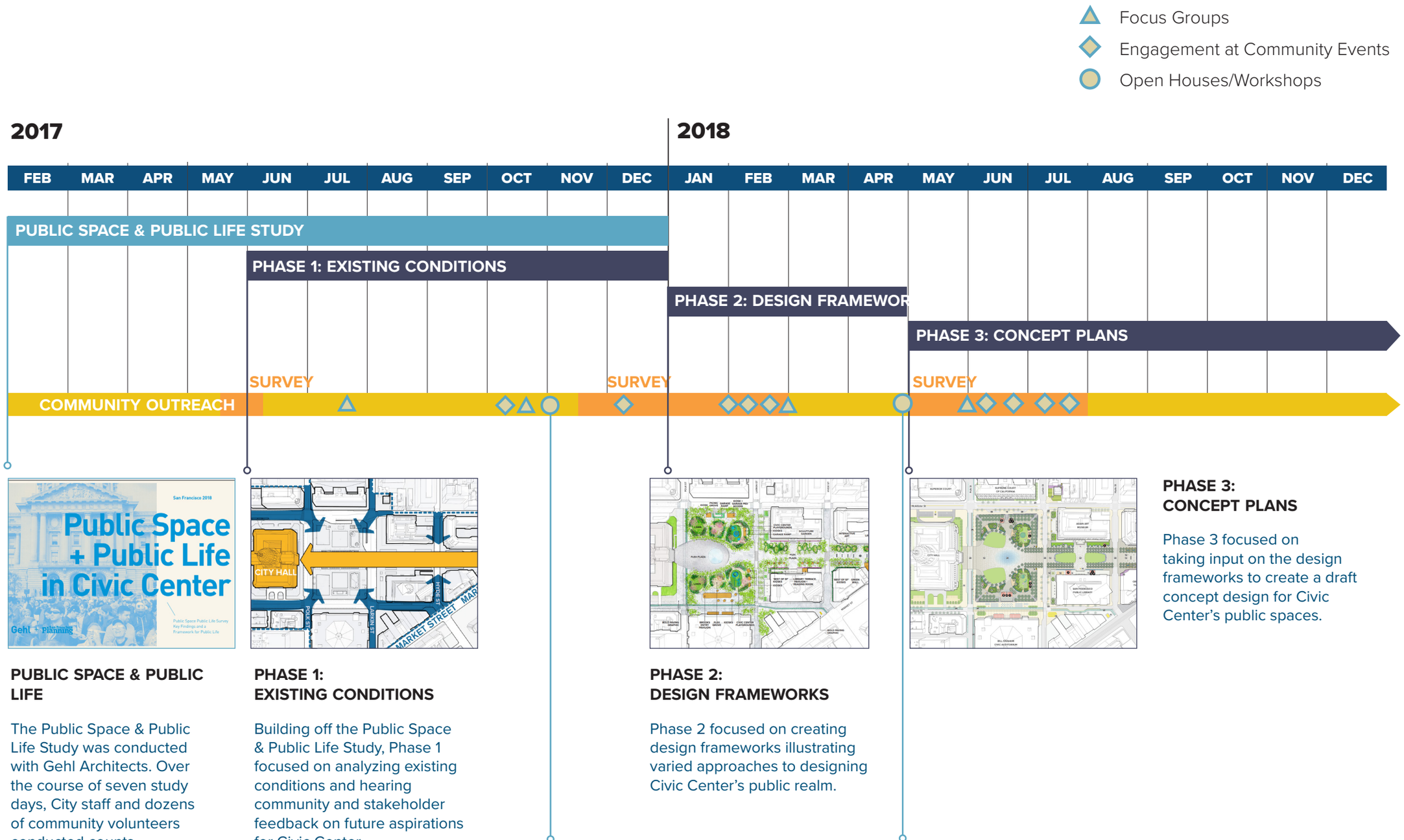
The project team created a "Mobile Outreach Station" to allow for on-site, interactive community engagement. The station features a miniaturized City Hall that functions as a suggestion box, a large aerial photo of Civic Center, rolling display cabinets, and community chalkboard where passerby can share ideas. Throughout 2017 and 2018 the station was deployed at multiple community events and at the Heart of the City Farmers' Market.



Community Workshops & Meetings

Three major community workshops were held to allow the community to come together, learn about, and provide feedback on the Plan and various stages of its development. In addition to the three large workshops, the project team attended and/or convened numerous meeting so with local stakeholder groups.

Plan Timeline



PUBLIC SPACE & PUBLIC LIFE

The Public Space & Public Life Study was conducted with Gehl Architects. Over the course of seven study days, City staff and dozens of community volunteers conducted counts, observations, and intercept surveys that measured how people use, move through, and feel about Civic Center's public spaces.

PHASE 1: EXISTING CONDITIONS

Building off the Public Space & Public Life Study, Phase 1 focused on analyzing existing conditions and hearing community and stakeholder feedback on future aspirations for Civic Center.

PHASE 2: DESIGN FRAMEWORKS

Phase 2 focused on creating design frameworks illustrating varied approaches to designing Civic Center's public realm.

PHASE 3: CONCEPT PLANS

Phase 3 focused on taking input on the design frameworks to create a draft concept design for Civic Center's public spaces.

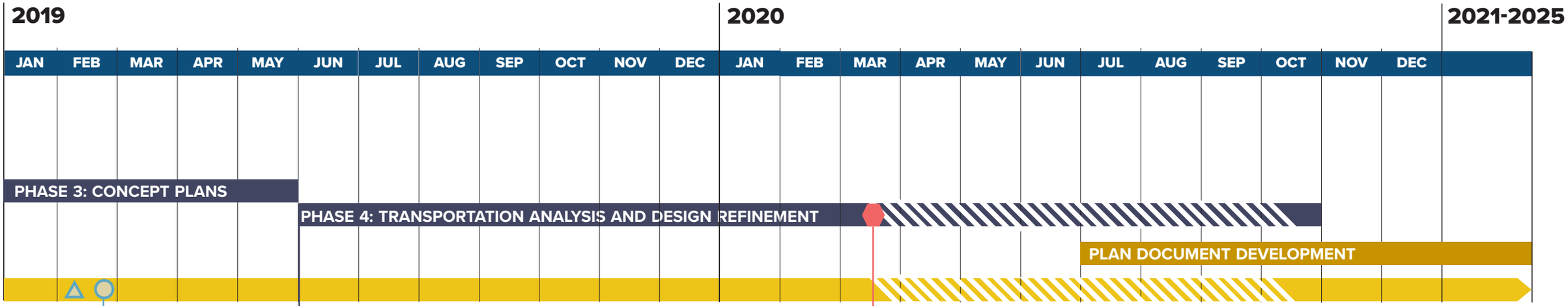
WORKSHOP #1

On November 7, 2017 over 70 people came to UC Law to attend the Plan's first workshop and provide feedback via interactive boards and group discussion.

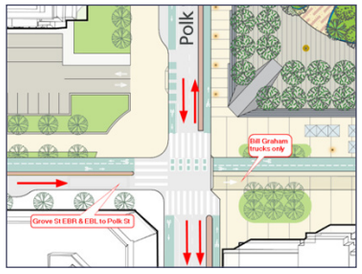
WORKSHOP #2

On April 24, 2018 over 140 people came to Bill Graham Civic Auditorium to attend the Plan's second workshop and provide feedback on initial design frameworks.

- Focus Groups
- Mobile Outreach Station Days
- Open Houses/Workshops



Community outreach coordinated via the Civic Center Initiative continued through Plan endorsement in 2025.



PHASE 4: TRANSPORTATION ANALYSIS & DESIGN REFINEMENT

Phase 4 included transportation analysis and design refinement, primarily focused on refining the design proposals for Civic Center's streets. The process of refining street designs was slowed in 2020 as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic.



WORKSHOP #3

On February 27, 2019 over 140 people came to City Hall to attend a community celebration of the vision, featuring arts, performances, and opportunities to provide feedback on the concept designs for Civic Center's public realm.

CITYWIDE SHELTER IN PLACE ORDER IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

On March 16, the City and County of San Francisco issued a shelter-in-place order in response to the coronavirus pandemic. This global disaster impacted many aspects of the City's' work and necessitated a pause in the project timeline. The ongoing pandemic may continue to impact the timeline for finalizing and implementing the Plan. The pandemic has also demonstrated how vital open space is for all San Franciscans. Given that the dense neighborhoods surrounding Civic Center lack sufficient open space, the pandemic has underscored how critical it is that Civic Center's public realm be invested in and cared for as a welcoming public space for all.

Existing Conditions Analysis

The inter-agency and consultant team studied past plans and existing conditions across disciplines to inform the process.

Historic Context



Civic Center is historically significant. Portions of the Plan area were designated a National Historic Landmark District in 1987.

Demographics



Civic Center's public spaces serve a diverse range of residents, workers and visitors. (See info on the facing page)

Open Space Access



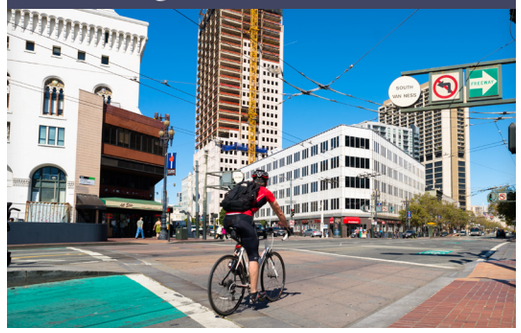
Neighborhoods adjacent to Civic Center lack sufficient open space to serve their dense and diverse populations. (See info on page 11)

Vulnerable Populations



Vulnerable populations - such as people experiencing homelessness - rely on Civic Center's public spaces, and are a key stakeholder group.

Neighborhood Growth



As the Civic Center neighborhood attracts new housing and jobs, there is an increased demand for open space.

Nearby Amenities



Most neighborhood-serving amenities are clustered at the periphery of the district, away from the central public spaces.

Architectural Context



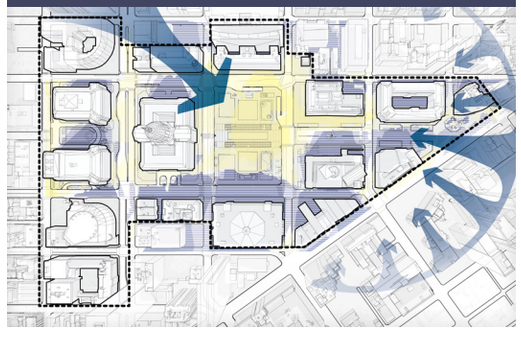
Civic Center's grand Beaux-Arts architecture can also contribute to a sense of the area being cold and inactive.

Trees + Plantings



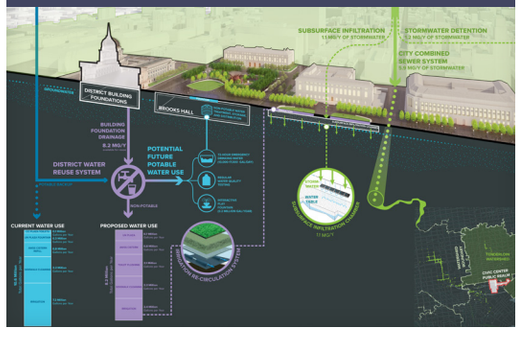
Civic Center's trees and plantings lack biodiversity, and there is strong community support for additional greening and planting.

Micro-Climatic Conditions



Civic Center feels inhospitable on windy days and after dark. Design changes can help mitigate wind and make the area more inviting.

Green Infrastructure



Civic Center offers numerous opportunities to improve local environmental conditions and advance sustainability goals through green infrastructure.

Transportation



Civic Center's wide streets were intended to match the monumental grandeur of it's buildings. These streets can feel empty, inactive, and unsafe for walking and biking.

Governance / Stewardship



Overlapping jurisdictional boundaries have historically made coordination and stewardship in Civic Center challenging. New models of collaboration provide frameworks that can help.

Past plans reviewed include the Civic Center Sustainable Utilities District Plan, Better Market Street, the San Francisco Better Streets Plan, and the Civic Center Historic District Cultural Landscape Inventory.

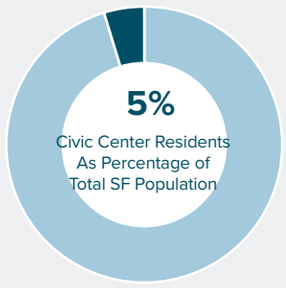
HIGHLIGHT

Civic Center's public spaces serve a diverse population

Total Population

43,791 Civic Center/Tenderloin

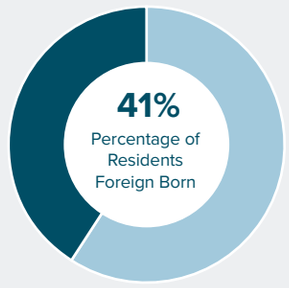
881,549 San Francisco



Country of Origin

41% Foreign Born

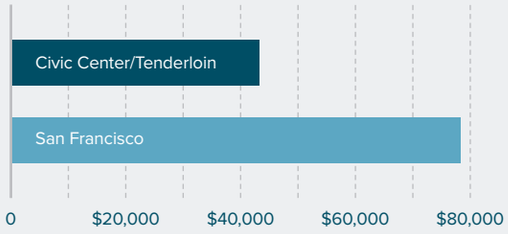
59% Born in the U.S.



Median Household Income

$43,228 Civic Center/Tenderloin

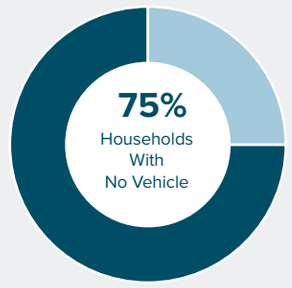
$78,378 San Francisco

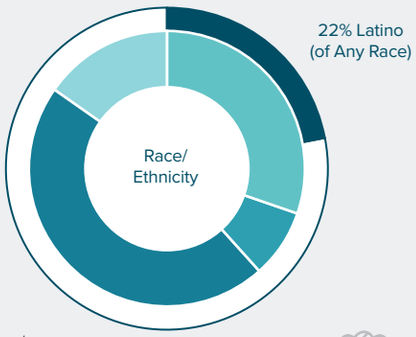


Households With No Vehicle

75% No Vehicle

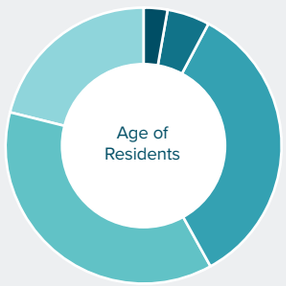
25% One or More Vehicle





Race/ Ethnicity

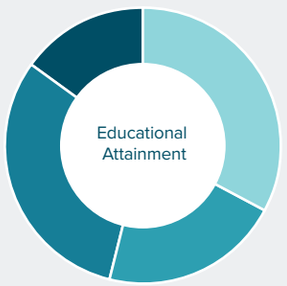
Asian	30%
Black/African American	8%
White	46%
Native American Indian	0%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0%
Other/Two or More Races	15%
% Latino (of Any Race)	22%



Age of Residents

0 - 4 Years	3%
5 - 17 Years	5%
18 - 34 Years	34%
35 - 59 Years	37%
60 and Older	21%

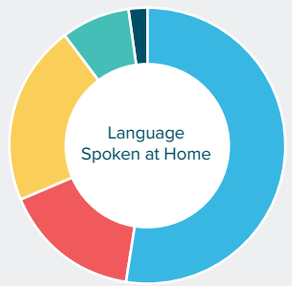
40.6
Median Age of Residents



Educational Attainment

High School or Less	33%
Some College/Associate Degree	21%
College Degree	31%
Graduate/Professional Degree	15%

Data of residents 25 years and older



Language Spoken at Home

English Only	52%
Spanish Only	16%
Asian/Pacific Islander	21%
Other European Languages	8%
Other Languages	2%

Data of residents 5 years and older

These statistics represent aggregate data accessed between 2015 and 2020.

Civic Center is recognized as one of the city's most prominent historic districts. For generations, locals and visitors have cherished its architectural and historical significance to San Francisco.

Anchored by San Francisco's stately City Hall, Civic Center is one of the most prominent manifestations of the early Twentieth Century "City Beautiful" movement which aimed to bring monumental grandeur to America's cities. Civic Center's grand Neoclassical public buildings were designed to stand within a harmonious landscape of equally grand public spaces. Symmetry, signature views, and architectural uniformity were used to create an aesthetically unified district deliberately designed to instill faith in democratic government, inspire civic pride, and invite civic gathering. Indeed, Civic Center has been the site of many important civic events including the House Un-American Activities Committee Protests, LGBTQ Pride Parades, the AIDS Candlelight March, and the Harvey Milk and George Moscone Assassinations.

Portions of the district were listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978 and as a National Historic Landmark District in 1987. In 1994, Civic Center was listed as an official San Francisco Landmark District.

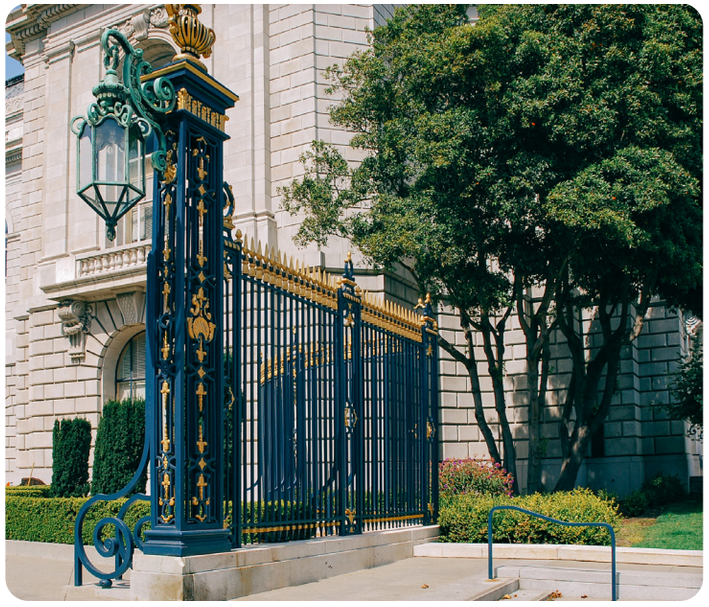
But today, Civic Center can feel uninviting when large events aren't taking place. More amenities are needed to make the space more welcoming on a daily basis.

While architecture is part of what makes the district special, it also contributes to some of Civic Center's most significant design challenges. Starting in the 1950s, projects to modernize Civic Centers' public spaces eroded many positive aspects of the original design. Over decades, critical amenities - like benches - were slowly stripped away. Large institutional and cultural uses dominate the core of San Francisco's Civic Center, and cut it off from neighborhood life. Neighborhood-serving amenities are primarily clustered at the periphery of the district, offering few reasons to linger in or near Civic Center's public spaces. Further, many buildings in the district lack entrances and transparency on the ground floor, contributing to a sense of the streets and public spaces as cold, harsh, and out of scale. While recent investments, such as the Helen Diller Civic Center Playgrounds, have begun to address the lack of amenities, the district as a whole still does not feel welcoming for everyday use when large events are not taking place.

Civic Center has grown as both an arts and culture district and as a residential neighborhood. Civic Center public spaces must be improved to serve existing and future needs.

For decades, San Francisco has struggled with addressing Civic Center's design problems. Plans for reinvigorating the area's public spaces have largely sat on the shelf while resources were allocated to more pressing needs, such as seismic retrofits of the district's historic buildings. The most recent comprehensive plan for Civic Center's public realm was drafted in 1998 but never adopted. Since then, much has changed.

Civic Center increasingly serves as a park for the adjacent neighborhoods currently underserved by open space, like the Tenderloin and SoMa. At the edge of the district, newly built residential towers add to the number of people who rely on Civic Center as an open space. And there is more change on the horizon; currently over 6,300 new housing units are in the development pipeline within a half-mile of City Hall. Civic Center's public spaces serve as critical open space for these nearby residents, and the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored just how critical it is that the City provide welcoming, high-quality open space near dense residential areas.



Civic Center is an official San Francisco Landmark District, and it has been the site of many important civic events.



The district's wide streets were originally designed as grand ceremonial spaces. Instead, they've become dangerous roadways and de-facto parking lots, with significant amounts of space devoted to cars.

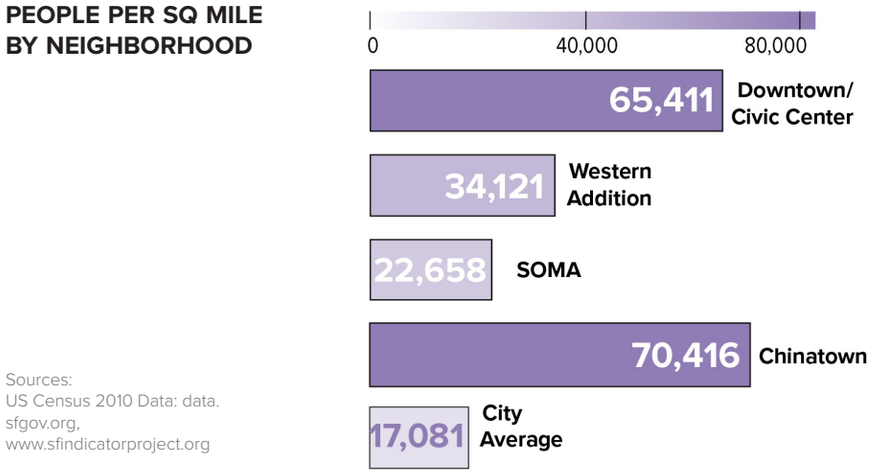


Civic Center's public spaces serve as critical open space for these nearby residents

HIGHLIGHT

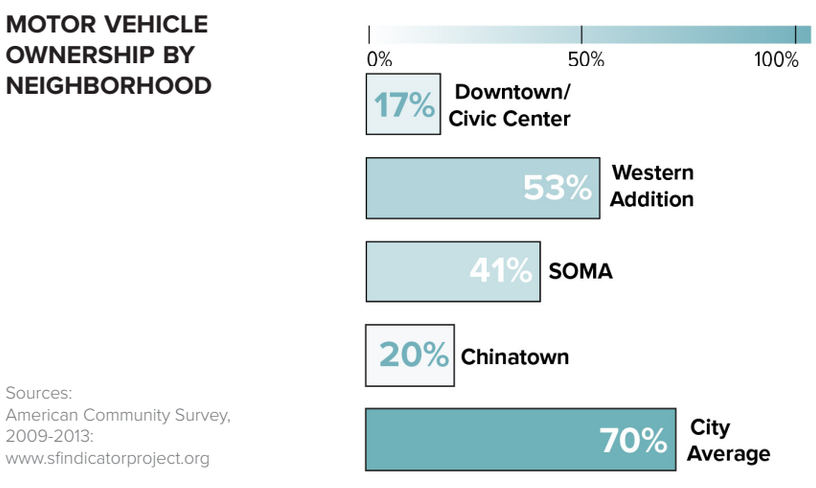
Neighborhoods near Civic Center need greater access to open space

Civic Center serves some of the city's densest neighborhoods such as the Tenderloin and SoMa.



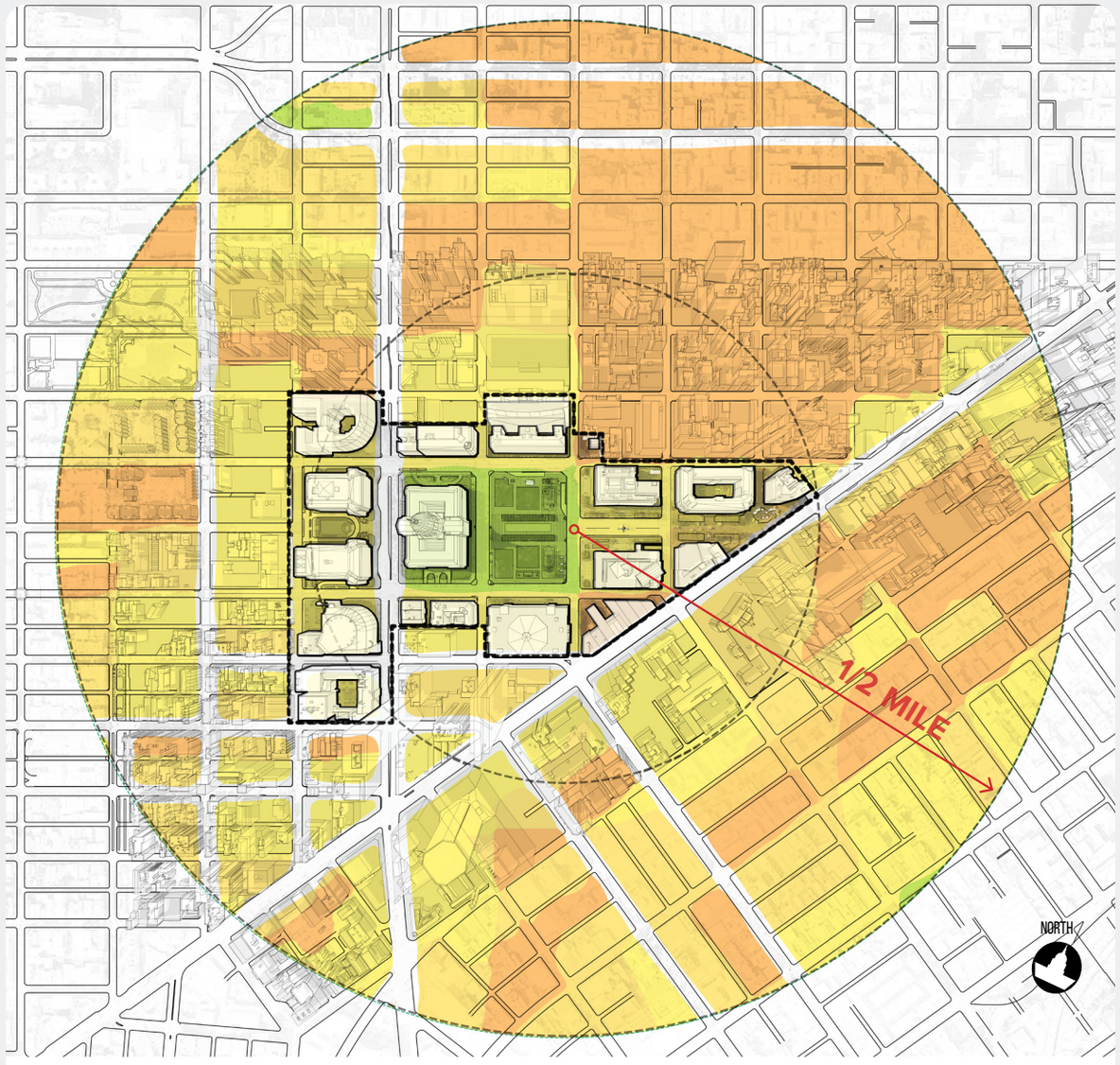
Sources:
US Census 2010 Data: data.sfgov.org,
www.sfindicatorproject.org

Area residents are more reliant on public spaces within walking distance due to low car ownership rates.



Sources:
American Community Survey, 2009-2013:
www.sfindicatorproject.org

Yet, neighborhoods near Civic Center lack sufficient parks and recreational amenities.



Sources: Recreation & Open Space Element, San Francisco Planning Department, 2014;
www.sf-planning.org/ftp/General_Plan/Recreation_OpenSpace_Element_ADOPTED.pdf


CHAPTER 1 CITY CENTER VISION

CHAPTER 2
CIVIC CENTER VISION

Public Realm Principles

CIVIC CENTER IS

A public space for all San Franciscans: a ceremonial gathering place that welcomes everyday use and inspires civic pride

The Public Realm Plan for Civic Center represents more than two years of community and City stakeholder input.

The concept plan includes intimate spaces that serve the daily needs of residents, who lack sufficient access to quality green open space. It also fulfills the ambitions of the 1912 Beaux-Arts plan: cohesion across the Civic Center Landmark District; ceremonial spaces with capacity for large demonstrations and celebrations that commemorate civic life and history.

Seven public space principles were developed with stakeholders throughout the planning process. These principles will guide design, implementation, and management of the project. In addition, detailed input from stakeholders about physical attributes, programming, and other priority topics directly informed the designs shown in the pages ahead.



CIVIC CENTER IS

A landmark district that celebrates shared history and tradition

Bird's Eye View of Civic Center Landmark District

The vision for Civic Center's public realm is guided by the original 1912 John Galen Howard Plan for the district (see insert). The concepts advanced by this Plan compliment the district's historic Beaux Arts architecture while allowing for contemporary and future uses. Fundamental features of the original 1912 design are respected and enhanced, such using trees to frame key spaces and view corridors.



RENDERING OF 1912 JOHN GALEN HOWARD PLAN FOR CIVIC CENTER

CIVIC CENTER IS

The city's cultural hub and political heart

View from the City Hall Dome during a large scale celebration

The design vision for Civic Center's public realm seeks to enhance the district's ability to host large civic gatherings, protests, and celebrations. A large, flexible gathering space is restored to the heart of Civic Center Plaza and the ceremonial axis between Market Street and City Hall is kept open to accommodate large gatherings and parades.



CIVIC CENTER IS

A flexible, accessible, inviting place for all to gather

View of Civic Center Plaza Mirror Fountain

Flexibility is key to the success of Civic Center's public realm. Public spaces in the district must be designed to serve the daily open space needs of the neighborhood while also hosting large citywide gatherings. Features like an interactive "mirror fountain" that can be drained for large events but serve as a play feature on less crowded days would allow the district to easily adapt to the ebb and flow of civic life.



CIVIC CENTER IS

A source of beauty, delight, and wellness

View of Civic Center Plaza

Colorful gardens surround the existing playgrounds and frame the large gathering space at the heart of Civic Center Plaza, providing much-needed green space and natural features to this dense urban neighborhood. In all three public spaces, a range of new features designed for play and recreation would enhance Civic Center as place that fosters both mental and physical well-being for local residents; many of whom have limited access to nature and open space.



CIVIC CENTER IS

A place that feels safe for all, day and night

View of Fulton Mall during an outdoor movie night

The design vision for Civic Center's public realm aims to encourage diverse uses, so that the area's public spaces are alive with activity and feel safe and welcoming day or night. The image below shows Fulton Mall transformed with gracious lawns and open, flexible plaza space connecting the Public Library with the Asian Art Museum, creating a vibrant, well-lit and inviting park setting into the evening hours.



CIVIC CENTER IS

Designed + managed through an inclusive process that fosters equity

View of UN Plaza Civic Axis

Equity and inclusivity are at the core of the design and management vision for Civic Center's public realm. All three public spaces are designed with ample amenities and flexible spaces for diverse users. Critical services, like the Heart of the City Farmers' Market, are celebrated and expanded. Future public space management strategies aim to build from the unique stewardship model already piloted in Civic Center, engaging community stewards and providing jobs to those with barriers to employment.



CIVIC CENTER IS

A generous space that meets the basic needs of diverse publics

View of Civic Center Plaza Seating and Gardens of Delight
The design vision for Civic Center's public realm provides a significant improvement in basic amenities like clean public restrooms, water fountains, and comfortable seating, in addition to added greenery and spaces to relax and recreate to provide green open space amenities to the surrounding neighborhoods. In Civic Center Plaza, for example, human-scaled garden areas expand the presence of the playgrounds and bring beauty and seasonal character. Playful running benches provide much needed seating and also help protect new planting areas around the existing playgrounds.



How Public Input Shaped Design

This Plan's public engagement program involved a diverse range of stakeholders through a variety of activities - from surveys, to focus groups, to story-based projects. The following pages summarize themes that emerged from this wide-reaching conversation about the future of Civic Center, and are also reflected in the design concepts presented throughout the rest of the Plan.

SAFETY

Civic Centers' public spaces are not living up to this responsibility. Surveys taken in 2017 revealed negative perceptions of the area, revealing that people don't feel safe there. While this data was collected before the pandemic, it is likely that the lack of foot traffic in the area during shelter-in-place has only exacerbated this challenge.

Just over 72% feel very negative or somewhat negative about the area.

72.49% feel either "very unsafe" or "somewhat unsafe"

The Plan places strong emphasis on adding new attractions and amenities to Civic Center and aims to support many activities from morning until night. Combined with lighting and enhanced stewardship, this design approach will help bring more positive activities to Civic Center, creating spaces that are activated and safe throughout the day.

Civic Center Public Realm Plan
Public Input Survey 1, 2017



TRANSPORTATION

Civic Center is dominated by a car-centric public realm.

Currently, much of Civic Center's public realm is dedicated to space for cars although less than 20% of people travel to the area in a private vehicle.

88.4% come by walking or transit. Thus, design for Civic Center's public realm must balance the needs of cars with those of people walking and using transit.

Considering that nearly 90% of people come to Civic Center on foot or via transit, the Plan emphasizes the needs of people walking over the moving and parking private vehicles. The design concepts aim to create a comfortable and welcoming axis from City Hall to Market Street, with human scale zones designed to welcome people in with seating, public art, planting, and other amenities. This approach aims to improve pedestrian connections between transit hubs and civic destinations.



PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES

Across surveys, workshops, focus groups and community conversations, we heard that the following physical attributes should be prioritized in the design for Civic Center's public realm:

- **Planting and greenery**
- **Basic amenities - seating (movable, fixed), public restrooms, water fountains**
- **Multi-functional open space that serves the needs of a multi-cultural population across age groups**
- **Balance of large civic events with daily activities**
- **Enhanced lighting - more lighting for safety, strong support of light based public art and facade lighting**
- **Celebrating and honoring history – showcasing the "Best of SF"**
- **Paving that ties all spaces together and uses geometric or varied patterns**

The Plan prioritizes the physical attributes most desired by the community. For example, design concepts show major enhancements in planting and greenery and a generous distribution of functional amenities throughout the district. All three public spaces - Civic Center Plaza, Fulton Mall, and UN Plaza - are designed to meet a variety of needs, from residents of nearby neighborhoods where green space is scarce to the crowds of people coming to Civic Center for large civic events. While some elements, such as paving, are applied at a district scale, special features are also included to celebrate the unique identity of each of Civic Center's primary open spaces. The diagram at the right dives deeper into highlights of community input about one of the most highly desired physical attributes - planting and greenery.

"Civic Center Public Realm is unique in that it is the only public space located in a low-income neighborhood inhabited by residents from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds... Civic Center's public spaces have a responsibility to be safe, accessible, and enjoyable spaces for the communities nearby."

Focus Group Report



PROGRAMMING

Desired programming of a public space is an important factor shaping how it is designed. The public engagement process highlighted the following programming priorities:

- **Preserve and celebrate existing uses: Heart of the City Farmers' Market, use of civic and cultural destinations in adjacent buildings, civic events**
- **Flexible and diverse activities for all ages**
- **More public art, performance events, markets, and small-scale kiosks for food/drink**

Design concepts prioritize the needs of successful existing events - such as the Heart of the City Farmers' Market - giving these events space to grow and expand. At the same time, the concepts build in flexibility for many future uses, from providing critical services during a disaster, to performances and events, or new ideas community members haven't yet thought of.



Addressing urgent social issues in the heart of the city



Civic Center brings together people from all walks of life. As the City continues to pursue solutions to urgent social issues like homelessness and drug use, improvements to Civic Center's public spaces should strive to make the area safe and welcoming to all.

This Plan proposes a long-term vision of how Civic Center's public spaces can be designed. However, design is not the only issue facing Civic Center's public realm. People experiencing homelessness and/or housing insecurity seek refuge in the area's public spaces. A confluence of factors has also made drug-related crimes a persistent concern in spaces such as United Nations Plaza. The City is working to tackle these complex issues through multiple initiatives that reach far beyond what a public realm plan can accomplish.

From a design lens, the City's past response to these issues has been to eliminate features–such as public seating–to discourage loitering or public sleeping. The resulting spaces are spare and unwelcoming, with little effect on undesirable behaviors. This Plan deliberately moves away from that approach and instead envisions a future where proactive and coordinated management and stewardship of these spaces results in a Civic Center that is inclusive and welcoming to all people, including those who are unhoused.

Beginning in 2023, San Francisco Recreation and Parks has been introducing features and activation, especially in UN Plaza, to bring positive life and vitality to a space that has long been spare and unwelcoming. This Plan supports, and speaks in concert with, these efforts.

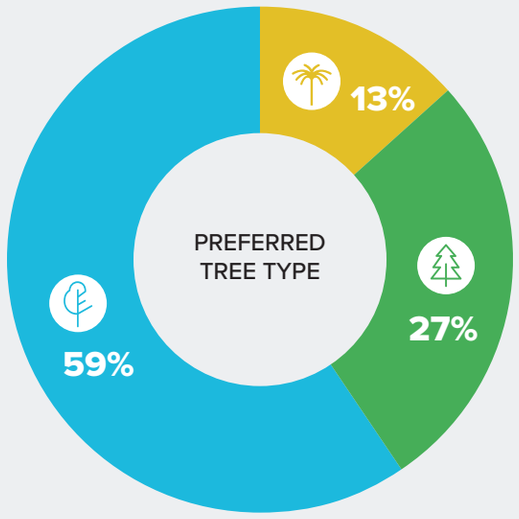
While design alone cannot be expected to solve social problems, thoughtful design can be a part of the solution. Developing a deep understanding of the relationship between design, inclusive activation, and public space management has been a critical component of this Plan's creation. The driving motivation behind the changes proposed in this Plan is to create amenities and attractions that welcome more people in, versus pushing people out.

COMMUNITY INPUT HIGHLIGHT

Planting and Greenery

During the Public Realm Plan's first phase of public outreach, community members were surveyed in-person and online about the amenities they'd like to see added to Civic Center in the future. Nearly 2,000 people shared their preferences and opinions, and planting and greenery was one of physical amenities people wanted to see prioritized most in the design for the public realm. Here's more detail on what they had to say about this topic.

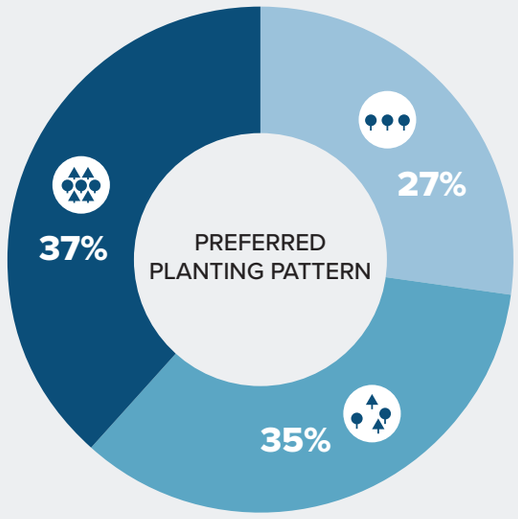
Q1. In general, what is your preferred primary tree type for Civic Center's public spaces?



Tree Type	Total
Deciduous	1,151
Evergreen	526
Palm	258

The majority of respondents preferred the deciduous tree type.

Q2. In general, what is your preferred planting pattern for Civic Center's public spaces?

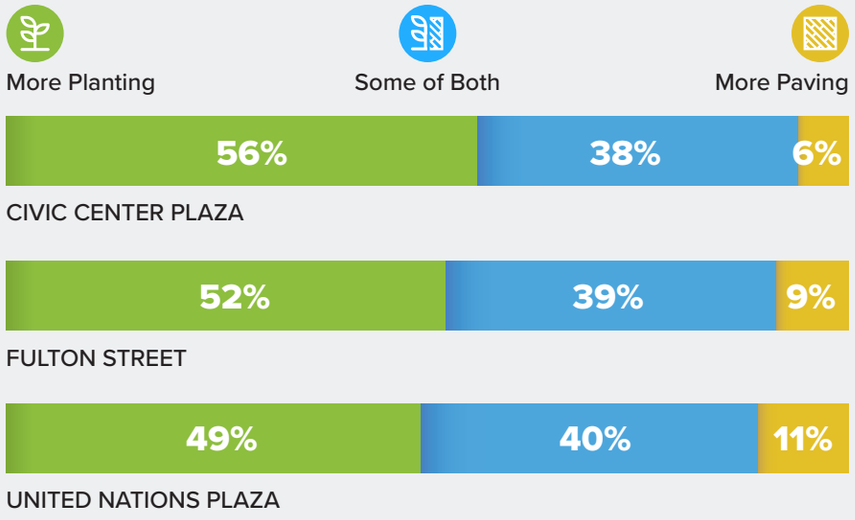


Planting Pattern	Total
Groupings	724
Random	663
Ordered	523

The majority of respondents preferred grouped and random plantings.

Q3. Would You rather have more planting or paving?

Community members were asked to think about the paving and planting space you'd like to see in each Civic Center's main public spaces. Generally more paving can provide more flexibility for large events but a less varied experience day-today. More planting generally can provide a more varied experience (e.g., more permanent landscape features) but less flexibility for large events.



Location	More Planting	Some of Both	More Paving
Civic Center Plaza	1,095	745	120
Fulton Street	1,015	766	169
United Nations Plaza	959	782	212

Generally, Community Members expressed a desire for more planting than paving in all three of Civic Center's main public spaces.



CHAPTER 3
DISTRICT DESIGN

The Plan builds on top of the early 20th Century Beaux Arts framework to better respond to contemporary needs and ambitions. The design honors this historic fabric while welcoming people from all walks of life into inclusive and functional spaces. This chapter speaks to the district as a whole and is broken into two sections. The first recommends unifying design elements, such as paving and lighting, which provides a stronger identity to all of Civic Center. The second presents conceptual designs for public spaces, streets, and architecture across Civic Center's three main public spaces.

The conceptual designs represent possible scenarios to achieve the Plan's goals and are subject to modification. The designs will undergo further refinement to develop details required for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and project approval(s). As the historic district is identified as a landmark district in Article 10 of the Planning Code, the approval process for Plan elements will, in most cases, require a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) as part of the approval process.

Design Goals

The Civic Center Public Realm Plan envisions a public space for all San Franciscans: a ceremonial gathering place that welcomes everyday use and inspires civic pride. The goals shared here, and the objectives contained within the concept designs, reflect extensive community input and inter-agency coordination. These goals will guide further design work, implementation, and management of Civic Center's public realm.



GOAL 1

Make Civic Center's public spaces flexible, accessible, and inviting spaces for all to gather.



GOAL 2

Offer amenities that meet the open space and recreational needs of people living and working nearby.



GOAL 3

Make Civic Center's public realm a showcase of the city's commitment to resilience and sustainability.



GOAL 4

Enhance Civic Center's role as an inclusive, safe, and humane hub with amenities, services and programs accessible to all San Franciscans.



GOAL 5

Commemorate and honor Civic Center's history and unique status as a designated landmark district.



GOAL 6

Design Civic Center's streets as extensions of its public spaces and prioritize the safety and comfort of pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders.



GOAL 7

Facilitate more active use of public spaces by strengthening their physical relationship with adjacent civic buildings.

PUBLIC SPACES

The public spaces within Civic Center, especially the three main open spaces of Civic Center Plaza, Fulton Mall, and UN Plaza, play a key role in civic life for San Francisco and the entire Bay Area. The public space concepts described within the following chapters seek to satisfy the design goals to welcome all and provide spaces that are functional, pleasant, inclusive, equitable, and elevate district identity.

DESIGNING AT THE DISTRICT SCALE: UNIFYING ELEMENTS FOR CIVIC CENTER'S PUBLIC REALM



FUNCTIONAL AMENITIES

Restrooms, water fountains, seating and other amenities increase comfort and usability.



PAVING + CIRCULATION

Paving creates visual cohesion and highlights history through interpretive plaques and inlays.



TREES + PLANTINGS

Trees and plantings provide access to nature and increase biodiversity.



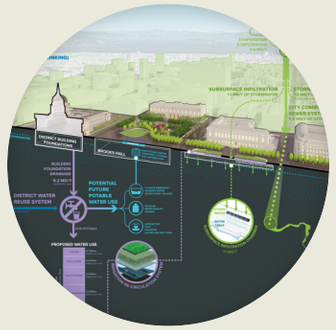
CULTURAL RESOURCES

An interpretative program highlights cultural resources.



LIGHTING

Lighting improves safety and supports nighttime activities.



GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

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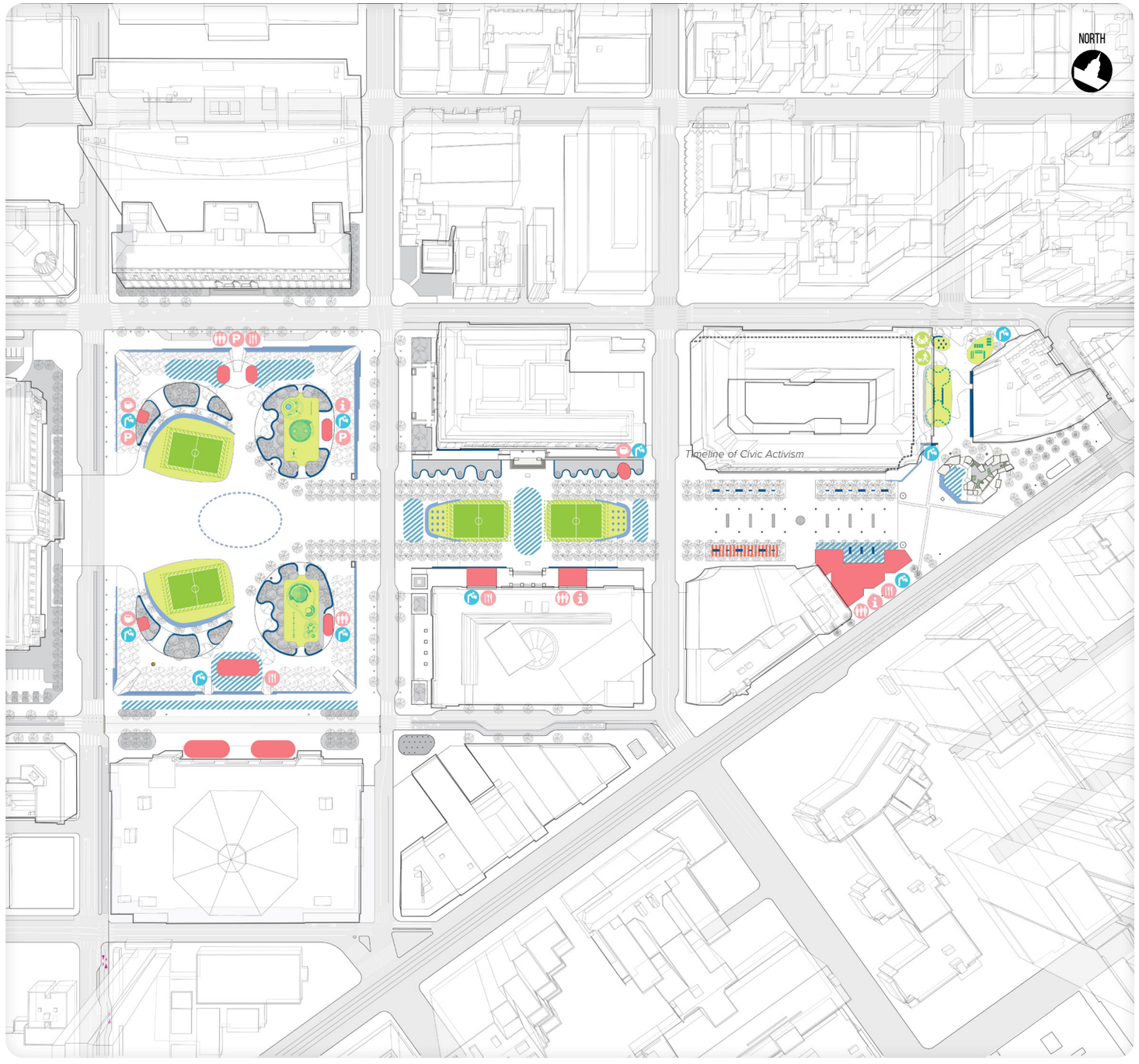
District: Functional Amenities

ENHANCING COMFORT FOR ALL

Civic Center will only feel inviting and accessible to all user groups with a significant addition of functional amenities, regardless of how much public art, greenery or recreation is brought there. Restrooms, seating, water fountains are basic features that form a backbone of the public space design and make it usable space for neighborhood residents and others. As illustrated in the map to the right, the Plan proposes new and improved restrooms and water fountains throughout the area, and various types of seating, from benches to movable tables and chairs. The success of these amenities is largely dependent on a strong model of stewardship to ensure the facilities remain clean and in working order. Programs such as the Pit Stop program, provide an excellent example of a staffing model that keeps restrooms clean and operational, while also providing jobs to people with barriers to employment.



CIVIC CENTER PLAZA: Through the Pit Stop Program, public toilets in Civic Center are kept safe and clean through a workforce development program that hires people with barriers to employment. (Photo by San Francisco Public Works)



- Recreation Area
- Lawn / Youth Soccer
- Play / Fitness Equipment
- Permanent Seating
- Movable Seating
- Lawn Movable Seating
- Informal Seating
- Kiosks + Pavilions
- Potential Best of SF Kiosks
- Information/Docent Kiosk
- Public Bathroom
- Water Fountain Locations
- Food Service

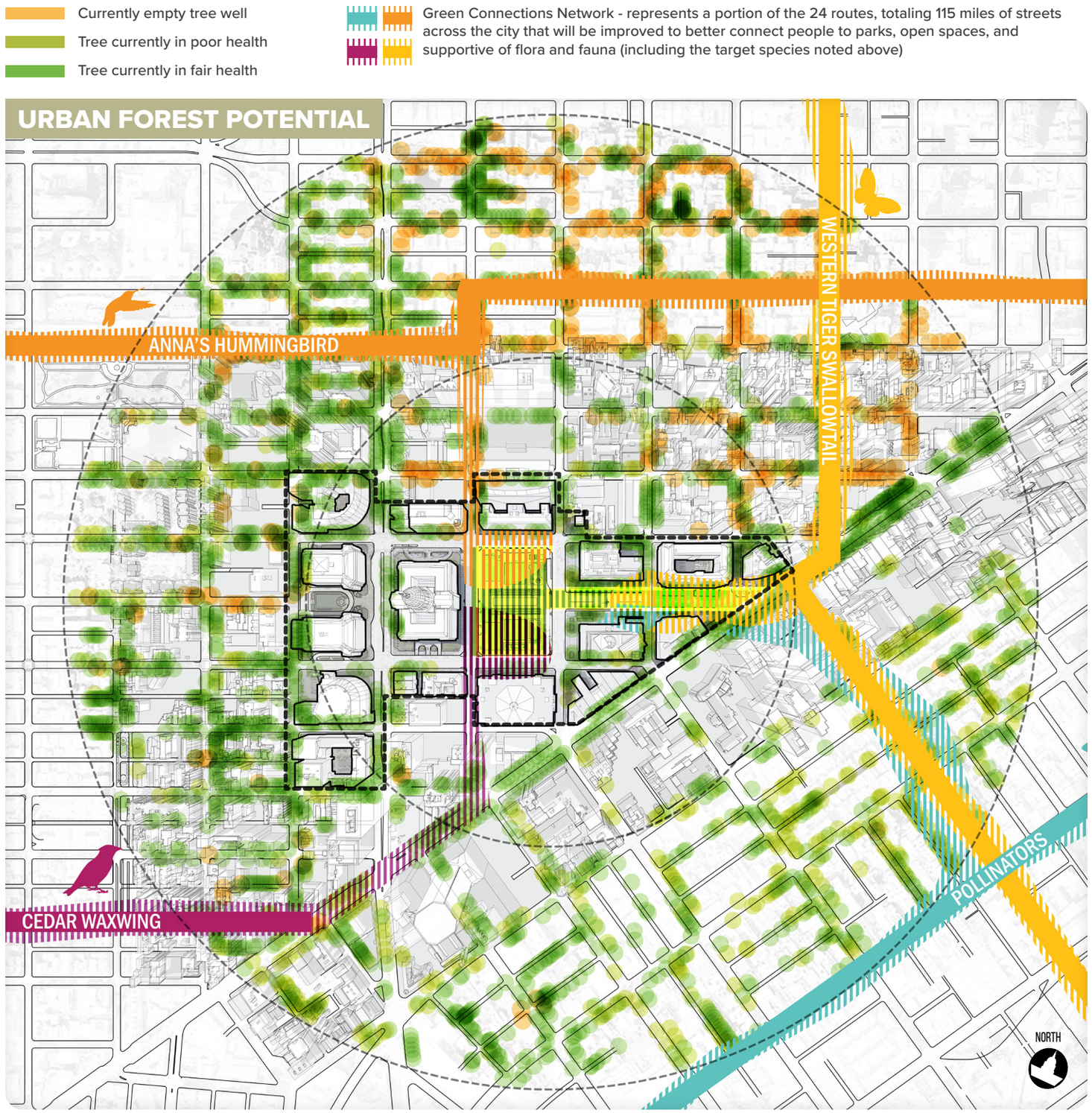
District: Trees and Plantings

ACCESS TO NATURE

The neighborhoods around Civic Center currently have the lowest percentage of tree canopy cover in the city, especially within the Tenderloin and South of Market neighborhoods. Public outreach indicated a strong community desire for increased access to nature and greenery. Thus, designs call for ample use of plantings and trees to make Civic Center's public spaces more inviting. Trees shelter the public spaces from wind, provide shade, and create seasonal delight and spectacle across the District. They help unify the district and visually reinforce the Civic Promenade connecting City Hall to Market Street.

Trees and plantings also have many ecological benefits. Additional trees in Civic Center will help restore the city's urban forest, filter air pollution, provide habitat, mitigate wind, and help the City meet its goal of being carbon-neutral; trees and shrubs are the most effective tools for carbon sequestration.





CIVIC CENTER PLAZA, GARDENS OF DELIGHT: Evergreen and flowering shrubs will be added in areas where planting can be protected from the crowds that overwhelm Civic Center. Surrounded with seating, this increased planting provides an intimate connection to nature and offers environmental benefits.

District: Lighting

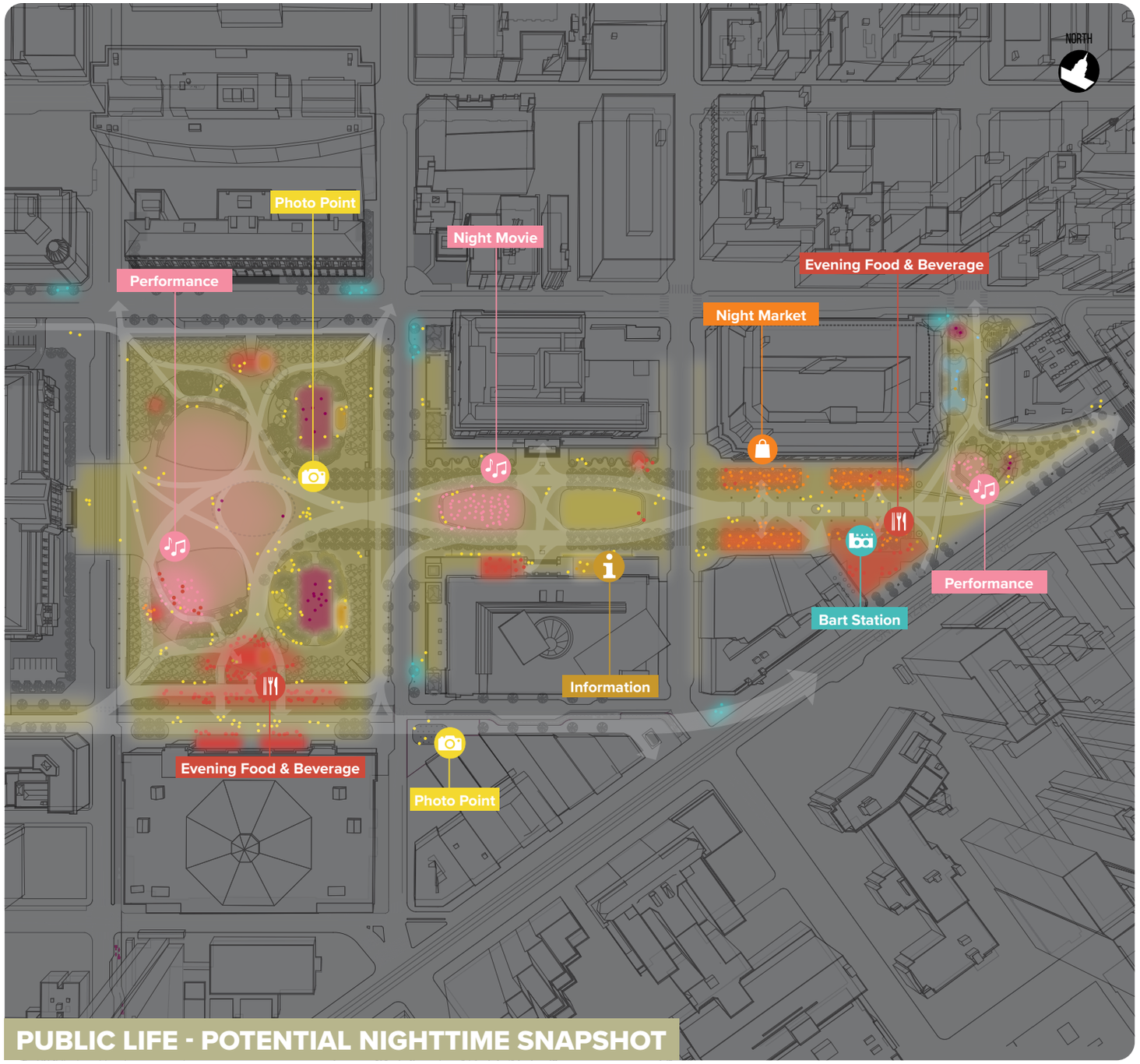
LIGHTING TO SUPPORT NIGHTTIME ACTIVITIES

Lighting improvements should be implemented throughout the district to improve safety and make the district a beautiful nighttime destination. For example, facade lighting highlights historic buildings, monuments and gateways. Lighting can also be used to reinforce the central promenade and bring public art into the space through projection.

Lighting is important to support a variety of nighttime uses, from visiting existing cultural institutions to enjoying new places to eat and stroll, or participating in outdoor programs. The map to the right shows a snapshot of active nighttime public life, supported by a strong lighting program.



FULTON STREET MALL: Gracious lawns combined with an open, flexible plaza connecting the Library and the Asian Art Museum create a vibrant, inviting park setting day and night.



PUBLIC LIFE - POTENTIAL NIGHTTIME SNAPSHOT

- Passive Activity
- Waiting for Transit
- Accompanied by Pets
- Eating / Drinking
- Exercise / Play / Recreation
- Commerce
- Political / Religious Advocacy
- Cultural/Performance
- Civic Work

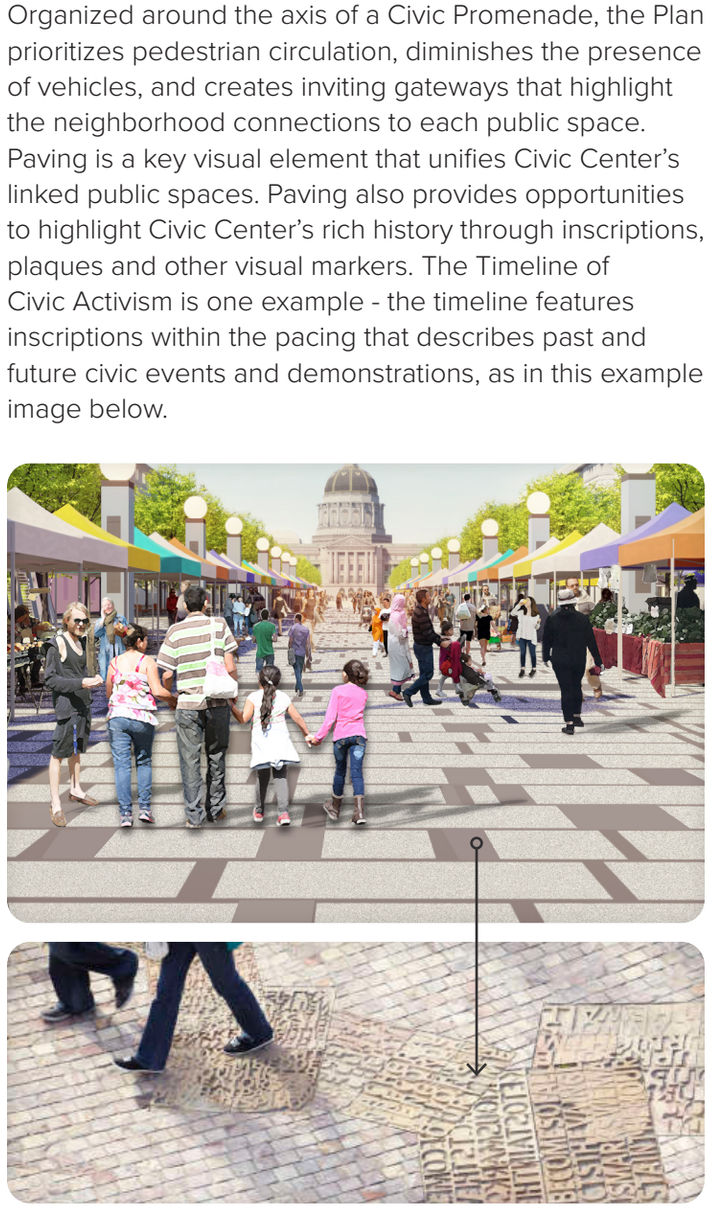
District: Paving and Circulation

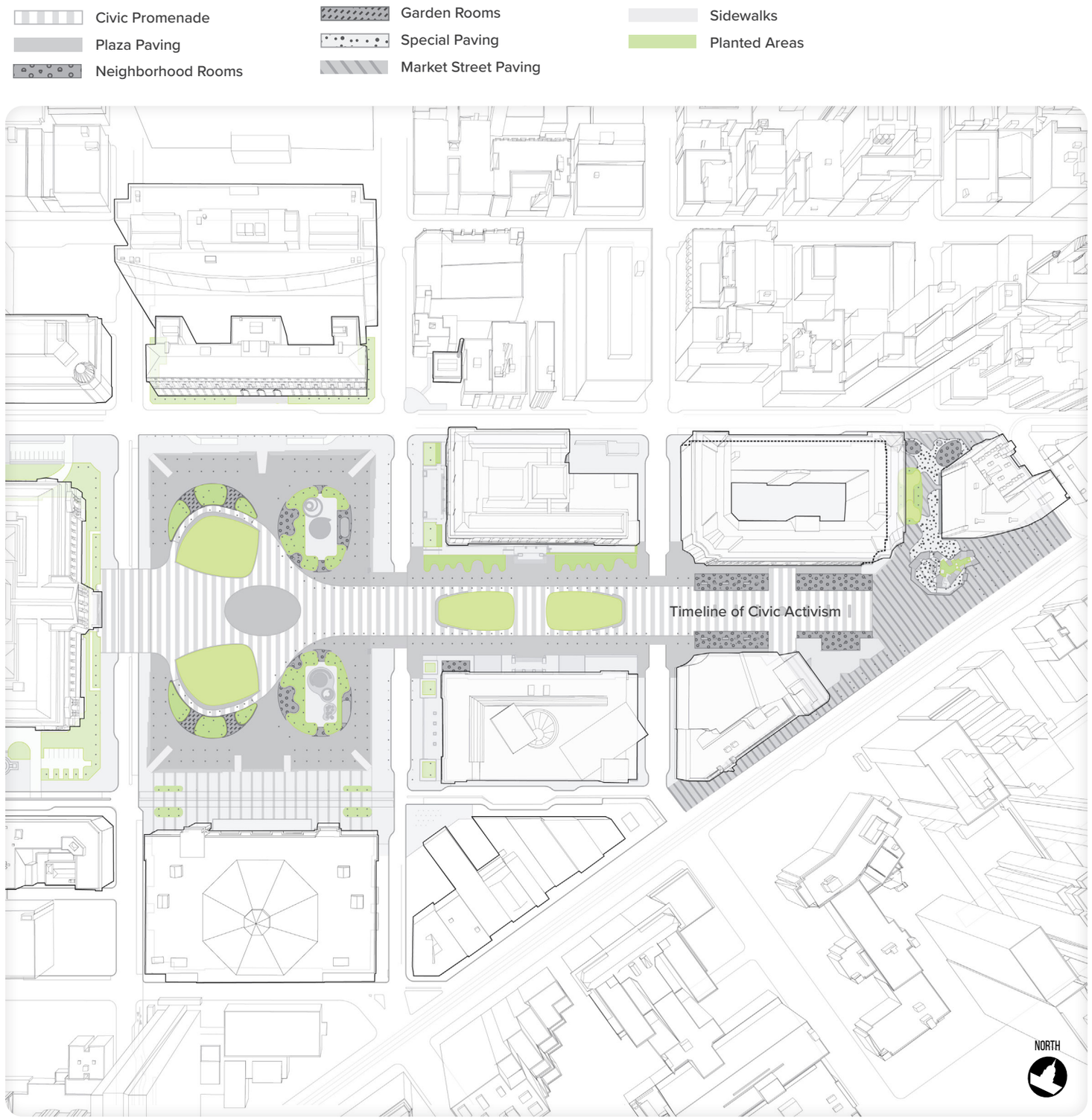
CREATING COHESION AND HIGHLIGHTING HISTORY

Circulation, universal access, and paving are fundamental components of how the Plan creates cohesion throughout the public realm.

Organized around the axis of a Civic Promenade, the Plan prioritizes pedestrian circulation, diminishes the presence of vehicles, and creates inviting gateways that highlight the neighborhood connections to each public space. Paving is a key visual element that unifies Civic Center's linked public spaces. Paving also provides opportunities to highlight Civic Center's rich history through inscriptions, plaques and other visual markers. The Timeline of Civic Activism is one example - the timeline features inscriptions within the pacing that describes past and future civic events and demonstrations, as in this example image below.







UN PLAZA, MARKET PLAZA: The Civic Promenade incorporates a special paving feature, the Timeline of Civic Activism, which unifies this key character-defining feature of the district and includes inscriptions describing past and future civic events and demonstrations as in this example image (see sample image bottom right).

District: Cultural Resources

A DISTRICT-SCALE INTERPRETATIVE PROGRAM

The Plan features an interpretative program that distributes monuments, memorials and public art across the district. These elements celebrate the history of the Landmark District, unify the public realm, and create beacons and markers that connect and orient people. New memorials and public art aim to celebrate the city's diversity. The interpretative program should be supported by an accessible and comprehensive wayfinding system that is icon-based, to be universally understood by multilingual visitors and residents.

MONUMENTS/MEMORIALS

Timeline of Civic Activism
The Civic Promenade paving area that links Civic Center's primary public spaces incorporates a Timeline of Civic Activism within the paving. The timeline commemorates the many important and culturally significant protests and celebrations that have occurred in Civic Center over time, inscribing in Sierra White granite stone paving the key details of these civic gatherings.

Local Heroes Walk
In UN Plaza, many historic elements, such as commemorative monuments to the UN charter, flagpoles, and mast lights are retained. To reinforce the neighborhood identity of the space, a Local Heroes Walk is integrated into the existing granite columns to celebrate community members, in dialogue with the UN's global focus.

Civic Center Plaza Gardens of Memory
Gardens of Memory evoke the history of Civic Center and the city and create a quiet place of respite where important people or events can be memorialized. Planting areas within the gardens are protected with benches and rails that could also honor the past - for example, the rails could integrate fragments of tombstones from the historic Yerba Buena Cemetery.

PUBLIC ART

Asian Art Museum Sculpture Garden
A sculpture garden along the Asian Art Museum's frontage can be curated by the Museum; a new food and beverage kiosk at the east end of the garden could be an outpost for the Museum's Cafe. Ample seating at the Library and Asian Art Museum terraces could expand the opportunities for people to rest and watch activities and passersby.

Flagpole Grove
The existing flagpoles that frame the central axis in Civic Center Plaza will be relocated to the corner of Grove and Larkin Streets, creating a gateway that celebrates the city's history as the City of Flags.

Orpheum Theater Façade
Enlivening the blank façade of the Orpheum Theater, especially along UN Plaza, has been in discussion since the mid-20th century, when a false Beaux-Arts façade was proposed. The Plan includes a whimsical take on this proposal with a resin-cast, colorful interpretation of the Federal Building's façade.

Leavenworth Community Message Board
An interactive community message board at the entrance to the Leavenworth Gateway will be a beacon and meeting point day and night, and provide a venue to share neighborhood events and information among the Tenderloin, Civic Center, and neighborhood stakeholders such as UC Law SF.

Temporary Public Art
Building on the success of large-scale art installations in Civic Center Plaza, the Plan identifies several areas where staging infrastructure can be provided to facilitate more rotating temporary public art.

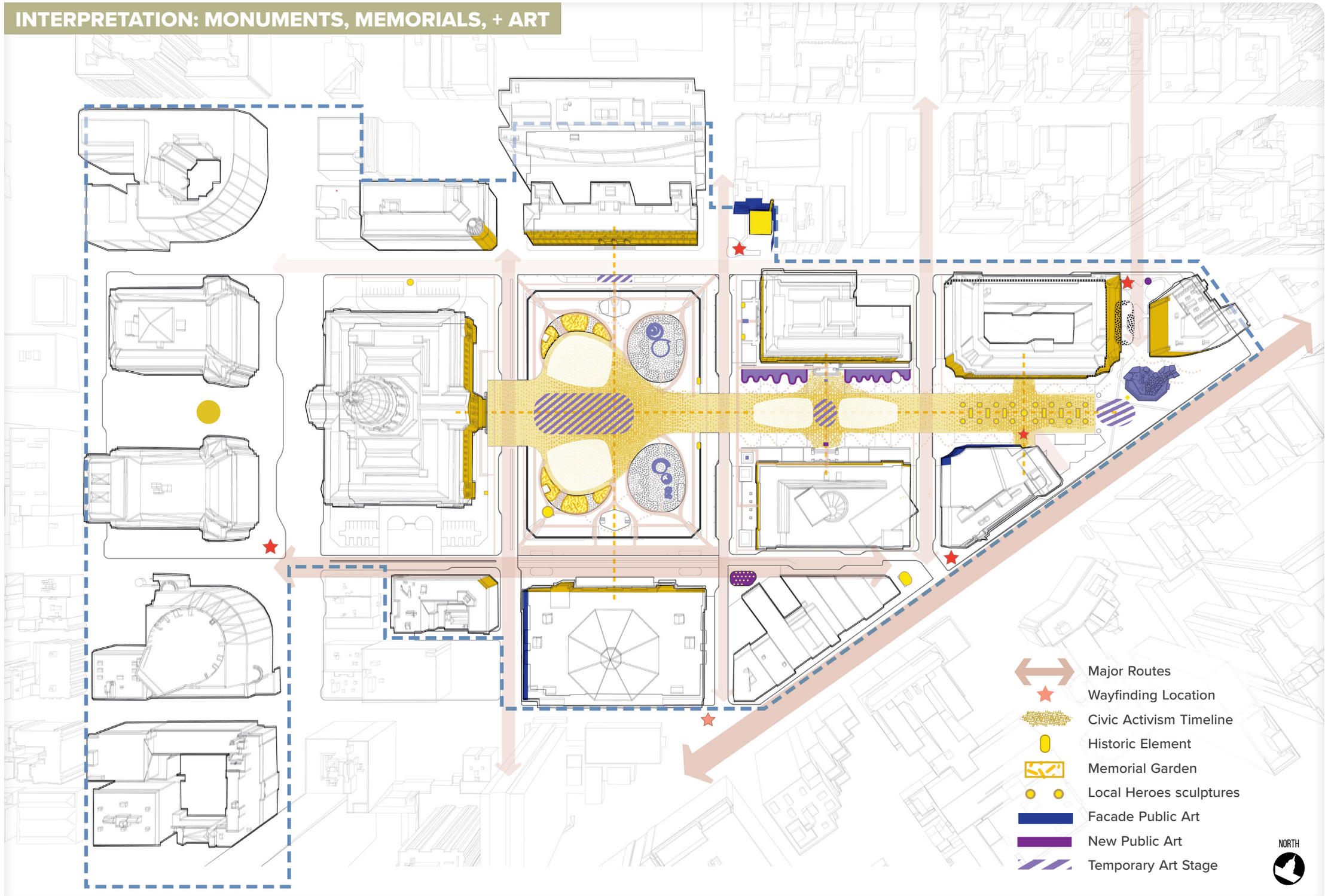
FOUNTAINS

Fountains have long been a key feature within the district, a foundational component of both the 1912 plan for Civic Center Plaza and the 1976 plan for UN Plaza. The Plan's Civic Promenade is anchored at either end by two fountains:

UN Plaza Fountain
The existing fabric of the Halprin fountain will remain, but will be adapted to provide accessibility, visibility, and ecological function, transforming what is now a barrier into an amenity for the neighborhood and a welcoming gateway. These adaptations to the UN Plaza fountain are supported by new neighborhood amenities on Leavenworth Street that create a gateway to and from the District and bring activity to this important entry point.

Civic Center Plaza Mirror Fountain
A new mirror fountain is located in Civic Center Plaza at the nexus of the historic east-west and north-south axes, referencing the central fountains of the 1912 plan. The mirror fountain brings texture, scale, and depth to the large civic gathering space at the heart of the plaza, and reflects the beauty of City Hall and the adjacent landscape. The fountain can be turned off seasonally, and to correspond with the activation and program needs of the space.

INTERPRETATION: MONUMENTS, MEMORIALS, + ART



District: Green Infrastructure

RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Civic Center should be an example of sustainability, and it must be resilient in the event of major disaster. The district's water systems represent a key opportunity with district, city, and regional implications.

Currently, limited Hetch-Hetchy drinking water is used to meet all non-potable demands within Civic Center; low-efficiency irrigation systems waste millions of gallons of drinking water each year. This approach places high demands on the drinking water system, which is problematic in times of natural disaster. At the same time, water resources such as rainwater aren't captured for reuse. Instead, this water is conveyed directly to the City's aging combined sewer system. This burdens the system and leads to street flooding and backups into basements.

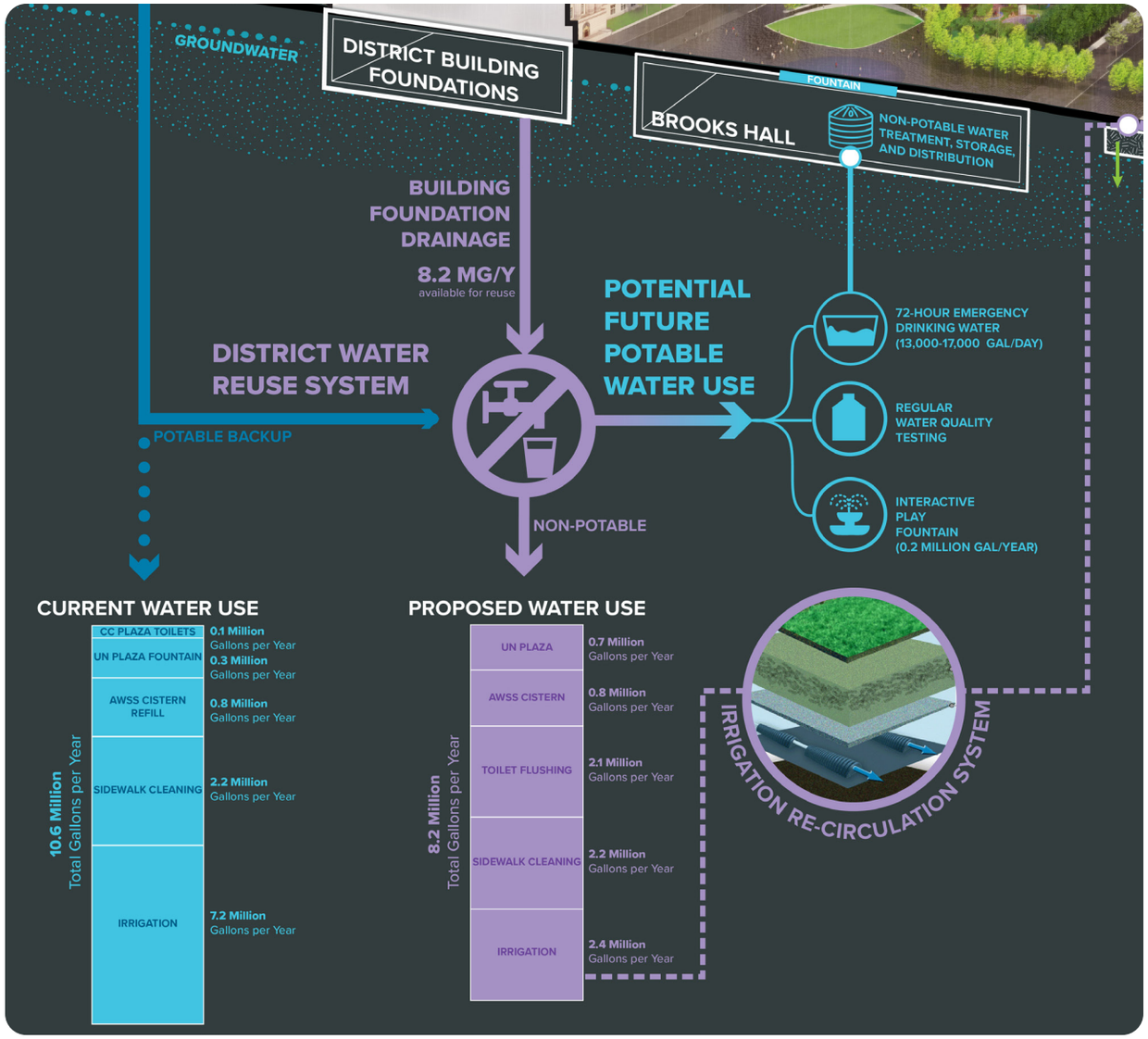
The Plan proposes a new "Zero Water Waste" approach that is more efficient and sustainable, with improved systems for water reuse and storm water management.

District Water Reuse System

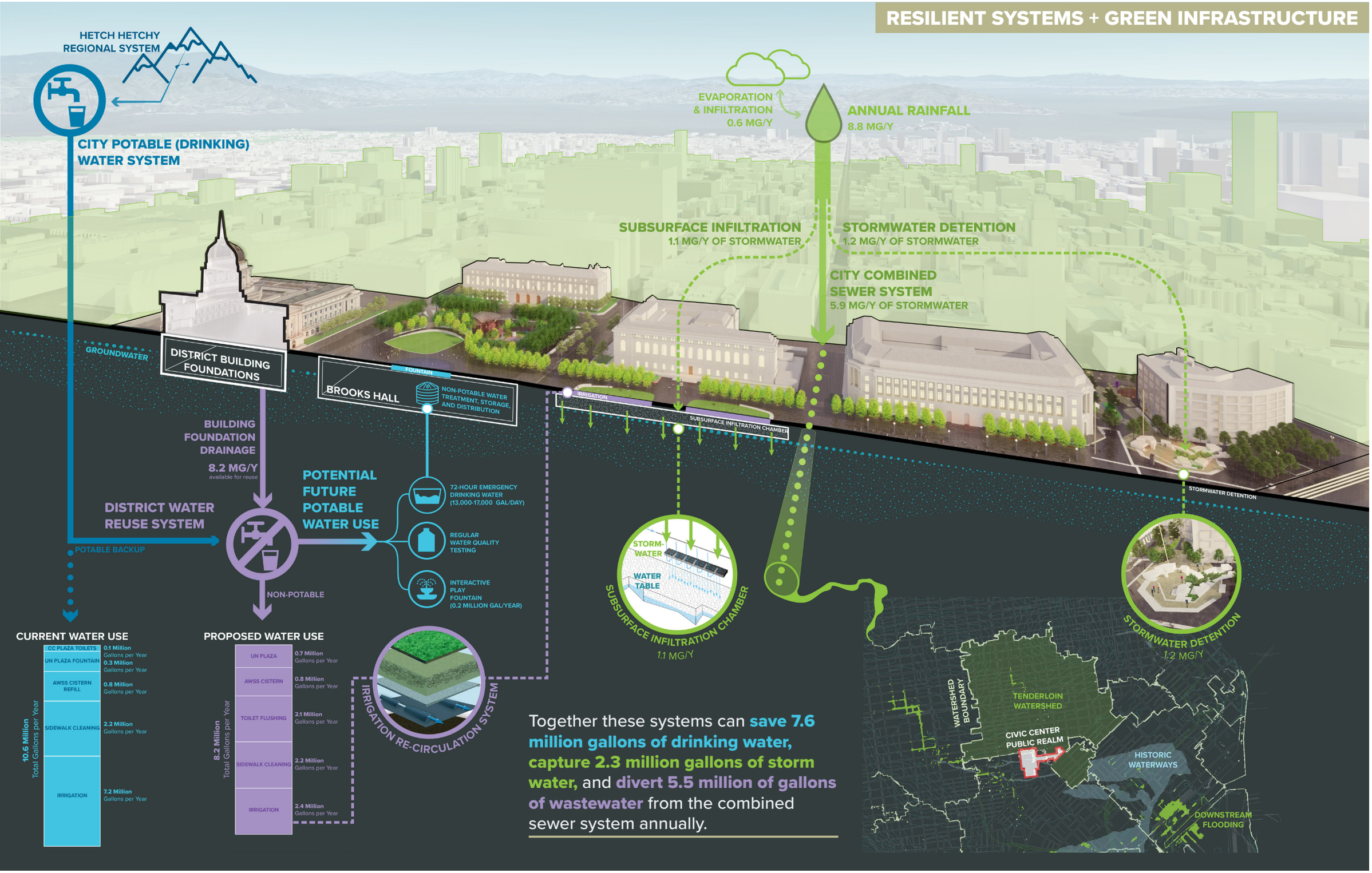
Reclaimed water from the district's building foundations would be intercepted for a district-scale water reuse system that provides water for uses such as irrigation, sidewalk cleaning, fountains. The proposed system would use high-quality foundation water to meet 100% of its non-potable demands, saving 7.6 million gallons of drinking water per year. A portion of the water could even be treated to drinking water standards for use in fountains, for regular water quality testing, and eventually for an emergency drinking water supply in a disaster. Excess reclaimed water could meet additional demands outside the district, such as toilet flushing within newly constructed buildings nearby, and street sweeping trucks.

Sustainable Storm Water Management System

Proposed infiltration and detention of rainwater in larger-scale, high-performing green infrastructure facilities on Fulton Street Mall and in the existing UN Plaza fountain would further reduce the District's demand on the City's combined sewer system. These spaces would have positive impacts beyond the district: because they are within a watershed that contributes to flood-prone areas in SOMA, they have the potential to reduce flows that cause flooding downstream. The City has already taken steps toward a more sustainable water system, by converting the UN Plaza fountain to use reclaimed water.



District Water Reuse System - Detail. For an expanded diagram of the Green Infrastructure Plan, please see following page.



Together these systems can **save 7.6 million gallons of drinking water, capture 2.3 million gallons of storm water,** and **divert 5.5 million of gallons of wastewater** from the combined sewer system annually.

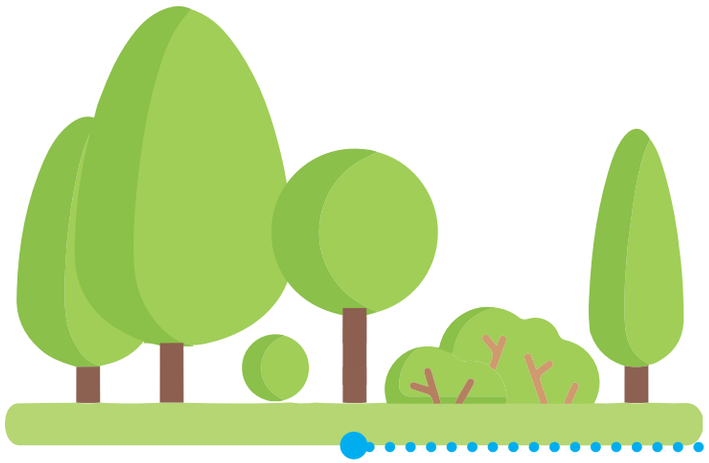
BIODIVERSITY & ECOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE

The Civic Center urban ecology illustrates the relationship between built and ecological systems. The multi layered urban infrastructure works collectively to serve different species, and human health and comfort.

Green Connections, as referenced earlier in this chapter, seek to connect people with nature, not only by making it easier for people to visit parks and open spaces, but also by encouraging public space that enhances urban ecology with elements such as native plants, stormwater planting and infrastructure, and street trees.

Biodiversity

Civic Center is a densely urbanized neighborhood, however there are opportunities to provide greater biodiversity as illustrated by the concept designs presented in this Plan. The associated benefits to biodiversity include refuge for bees and butterflies by planting with structural diversity. This structural diversity enhances the local flora, fauna, and habitats to retain and ensure wildlife flight, mobility, and nesting patterns. Civic Center's key species include Anna's Hummingbird, Cedar Waxwing, Western Tiger Swallowtail, and many pollinators.



ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD



Anna's Hummingbird can be found in urban environments where there are abundant flowering plants that provide nectar, especially those with tubular blossoms, such as salvia, fuchsia, and trumpet vine. They nest in trees and shrubs in urban parks, especially those with dense foliage for shelter and protection. Overall, they are quite adaptable to urban habitats as long as there are suitable food sources and nesting sites available.

CEDAR WAXWING



Cedar Waxwing are often found in a variety of urban habitats, particularly where there are abundant fruit-bearing trees and shrubs. They gather and travel in large numbers, eating ripe berries from shrubs and trees, such as crabapples, cherries, and hawthorns, each fall.

WESTERN TIGER SWALLOWTAIL

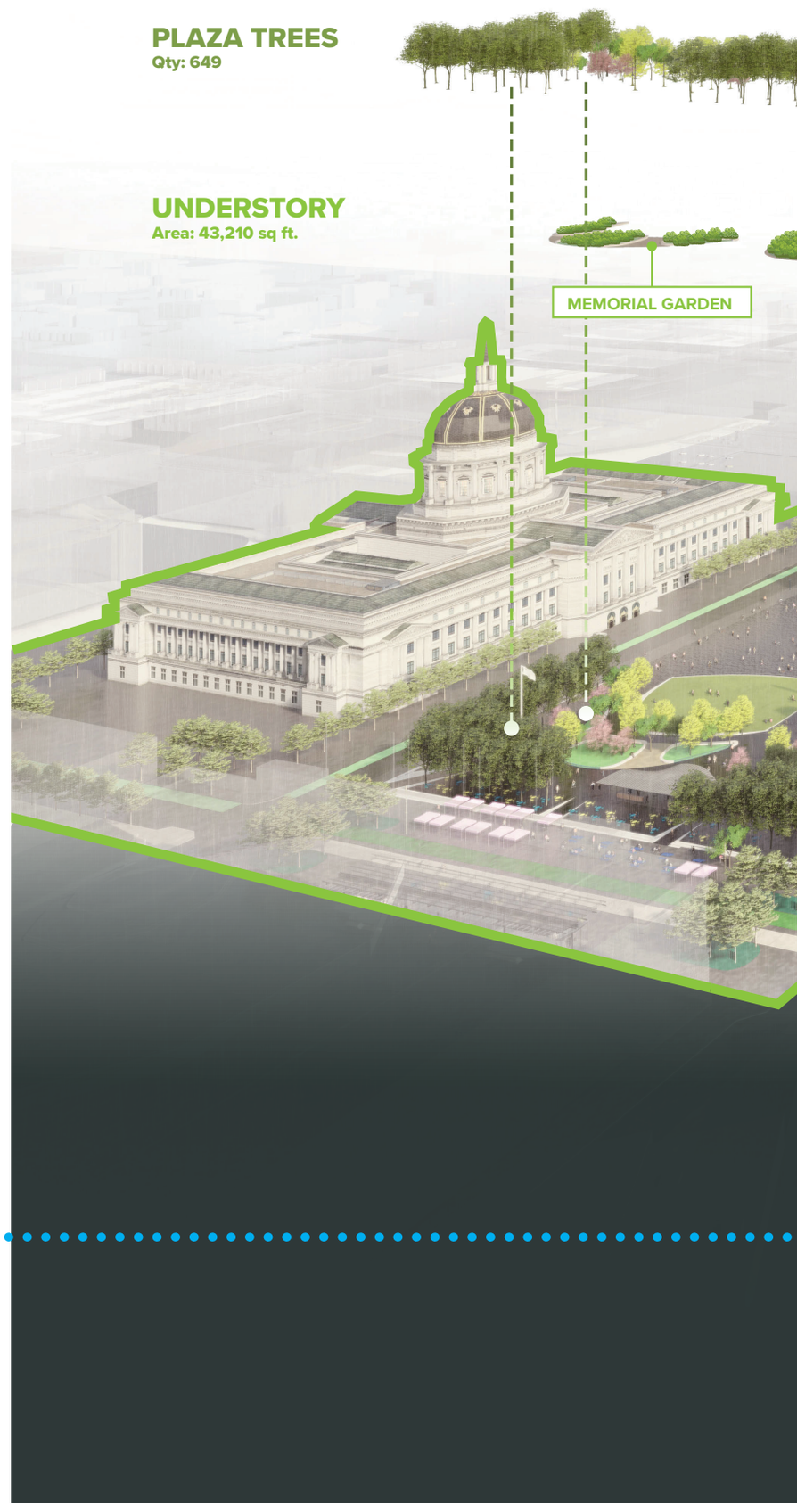


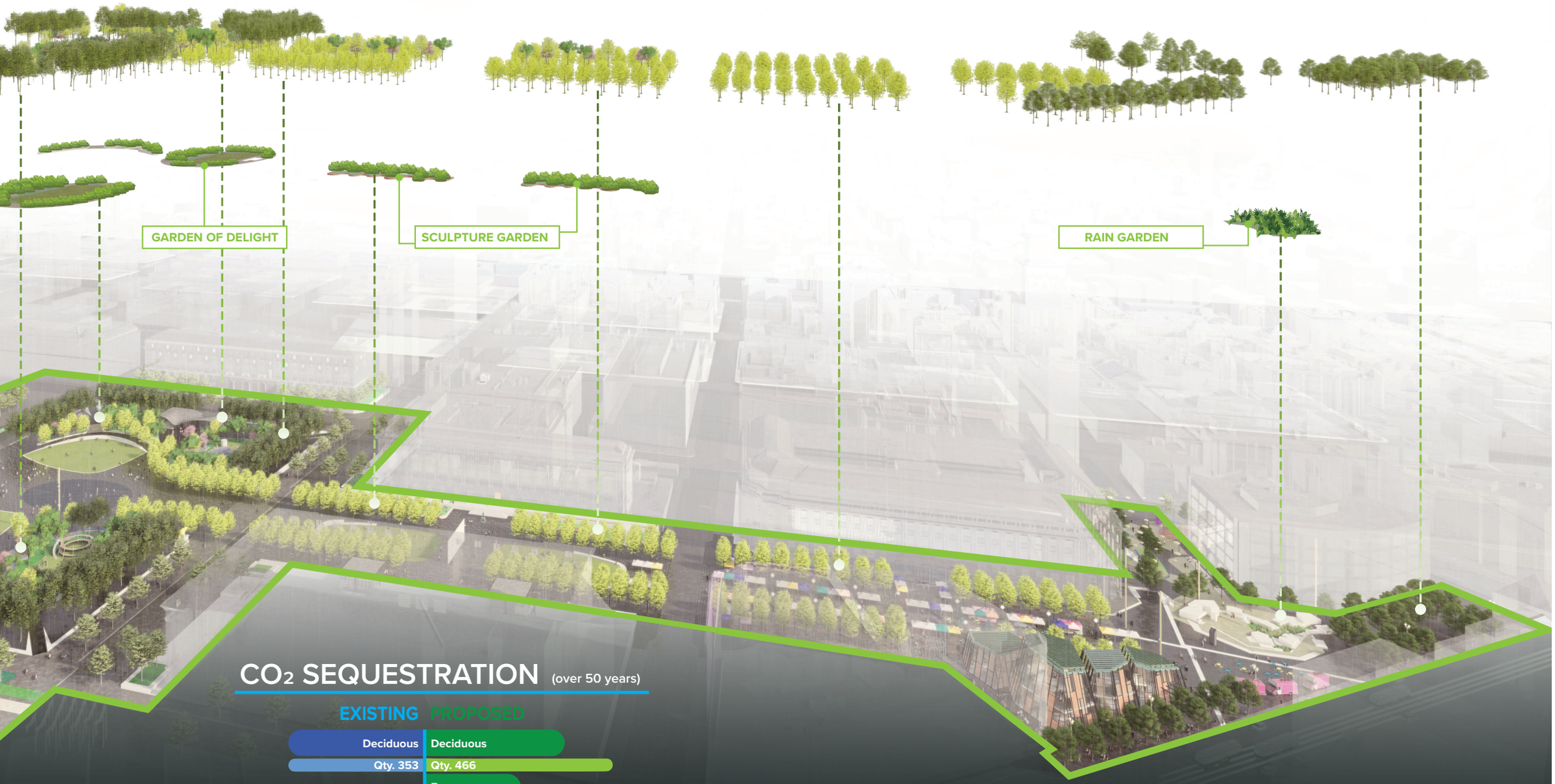
Western Tiger Swallowtail caterpillars can be found on the London Plane trees which line Market Street. In urban settings, in addition to tree and shrubs, they particularly favor areas with abundant nectar sources, including butterfly bushes, milkweed, asters, and other native wildflowers. Western Tiger Swallowtails can thrive in urban habitats making them a delightful sight in gardens and green spaces within cities.

POLLINATORS



The San Francisco Bay Area is home to a number of pollinators, including different types of bees and insects. You can find them in all types of habitats including urban areas like Civic Center. Around 90 species of native bees, from 5 families, are found in urban parts of the Bay Area. These are Apidae, Andrenidae, Colletidae, Halictidae, and Megachilidae.





CO_2 SEQUESTRATION (over 50 years)

EXISTING	PROPOSED
Deciduous	Deciduous
Qty. 353	Qty. 466
	Evergreen
	Qty. 133
	Understory
	28,425 sq. ft.
Lawn	Lawn
59,922 sq. ft.	43,210 sq. ft.
1,135,356 LBS OF CO_2 SEQUESTERED	4,070,124 LBS OF CO_2 SEQUESTERED

Over 50 years, The Plan provides A potential 350% increase in carbon sequestration over existing conditions

PUBLIC SPACES - CONCEPTUAL PLAN

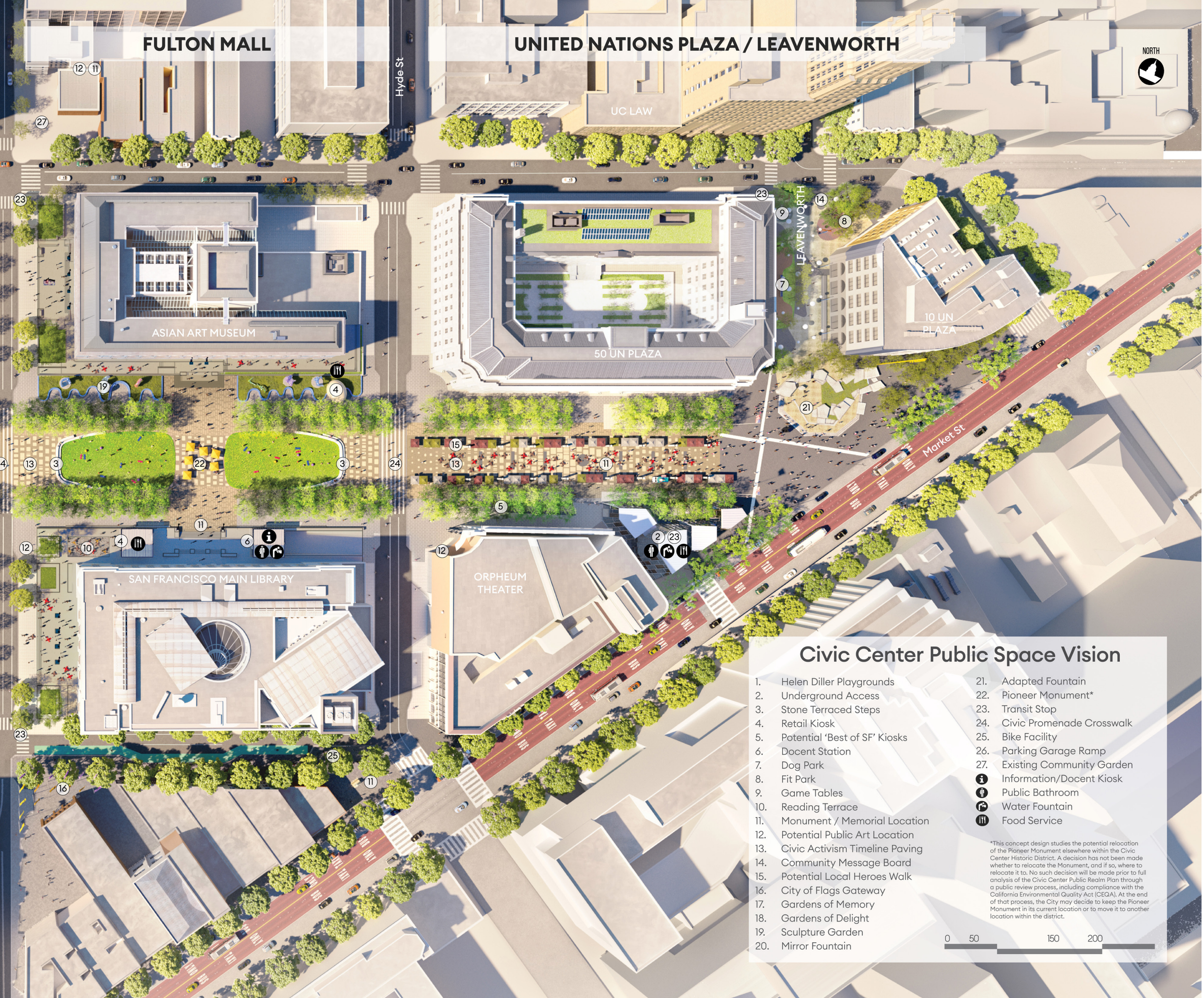
Unique designs for each of Civic Center's public spaces

While many design elements – such as lighting and paving – are best approached on a district scale, the Plan proposes specific approaches for each of the three unique public spaces linking City Hall to Market Street. The following chapters provide more details on the vision for each of Civic Center's primary public spaces, highlighting key features and functions.

CIVIC CENTER PLAZA (begins on page 69)

FULTON MALL (begins on page 89)

UNITED NATIONS PLAZA / LEAVENWORTH GATEWAY (begins on page 99)



Civic Center Public Space Vision

1. Helen Diller Playgrounds
2. Underground Access
3. Stone Terraced Steps
4. Retail Kiosk
5. Potential 'Best of SF' Kiosks
6. Docent Station
7. Dog Park
8. Fit Park
9. Game Tables
10. Reading Terrace
11. Monument / Memorial Location
12. Potential Public Art Location
13. Civic Activism Timeline Paving
14. Community Message Board
15. Potential Local Heroes Walk
16. City of Flags Gateway
17. Gardens of Memory
18. Gardens of Delight
19. Sculpture Garden
20. Mirror Fountain
21. Adapted Fountain
22. Pioneer Monument*
23. Transit Stop
24. Civic Promenade Crosswalk
25. Bike Facility
26. Parking Garage Ramp
27. Existing Community Garden

Information/Docent Kiosk
Public Bathroom
Water Fountain
Food Service

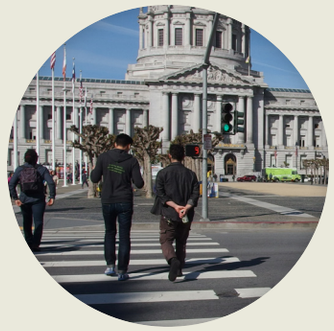
*This concept design studies the potential relocation of the Pioneer Monument elsewhere within the Civic Center Historic District. A decision has not been made whether to relocate the Monument, and if so, where to relocate it to. No such decision will be made prior to full analysis of the Civic Center Public Realm Plan through a public review process, including compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). At the end of that process, the City may decide to keep the Pioneer Monument in its current location or to move it to another location within the district.

0 50 150 200

STREETS

The Beaux Arts Plan of 1912 set the structure for the ceremonial streets that we see today in Civic Center. The streets provide crucial physical and visual links to the landmark structures in the area as well as transit hubs and cultural institutions. They unite and define the district and will continue to play key roles in connecting people and place. The design concepts that follow seek to respect the Beaux Arts framework, while improving safety, connection, experience, and amenity within Civic Center.

DESIGNING AT THE DISTRICT SCALE: UNIFYING IMPROVEMENTS FOR CIVIC CENTER'S STREETS



SAFETY AND COMFORT

Create safe, comfortable, human-scaled streets that encourage walking and achieve San Francisco's Vision Zero goal.



ACTIVATION

Design sidewalks to complement active adjacent ground floor uses and roadways that can easily convert to public space during major civic events.



CONNECTION

Use pedestrian-priority street design to reduce the physical and visual barriers created by wide roadways that now divide Civic Center's public spaces.



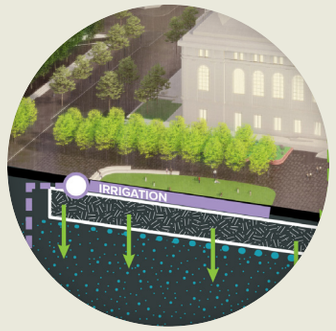
MOBILITY & OPERATIONS

Improve universal accessibility, enhance transit operations and fulfill essential loading needs to ensure efficient access to Civic Center's institutions.



DISTINCTIVE IDENTITY

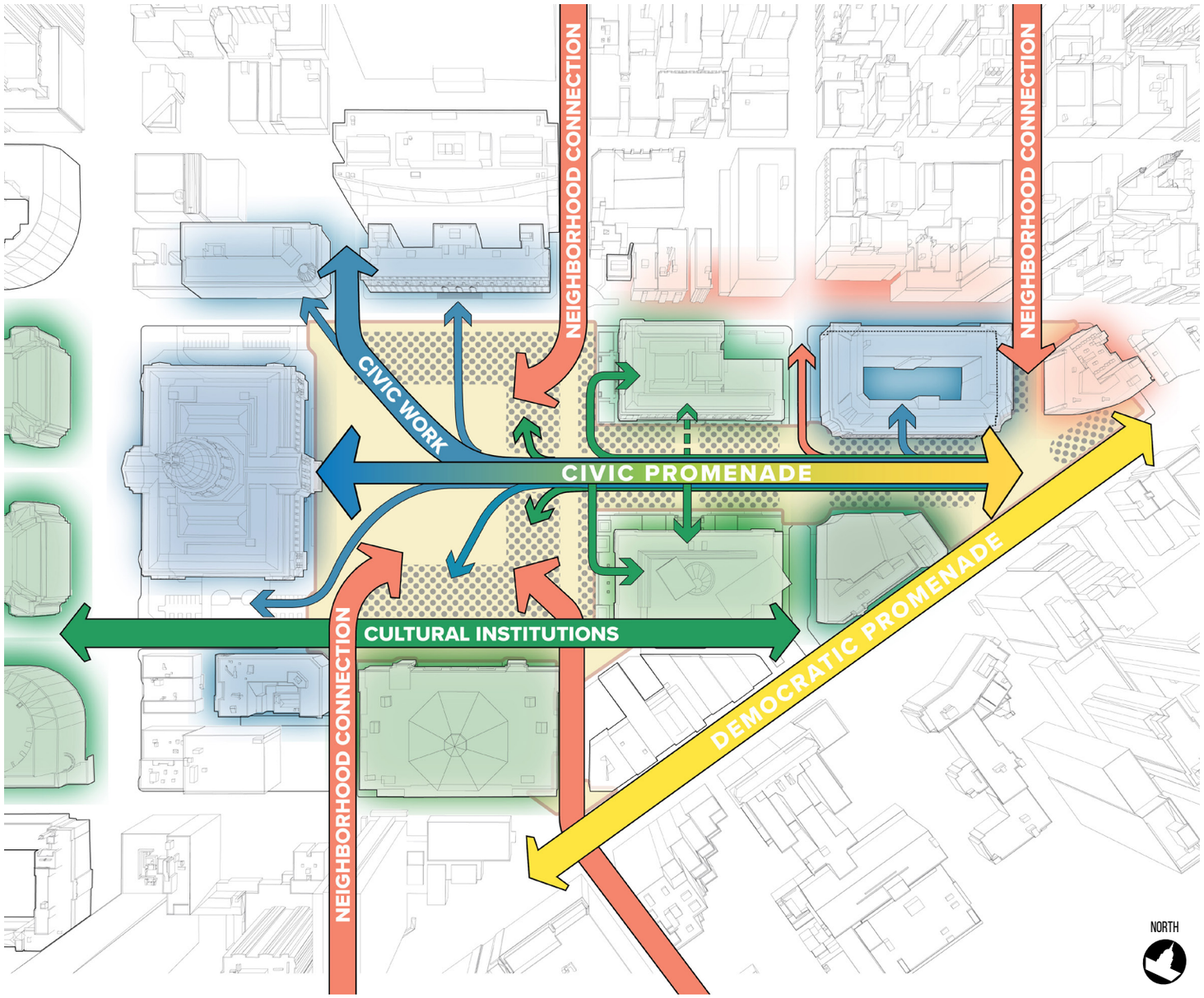
Enhance the special character and historic beauty of Civic Center through streetscape materials and amenities that contribute to a memorable district identity.



SUSTAINABILITY

Contribute to San Francisco's sustainability and resiliency goals through additional opportunities for biodiversity, canopy cover, and stormwater management.

District: Streets



INTEGRATED STREETS AND PUBLIC SPACES

Each corridor can serve all stakeholders while also elevating a specific function. The corridor map identifies a simplified concept how each street historically, currently and aspirationally serve the district. This includes Grove Street as a major “culture connector” between the major arts institutions along its length. Larkin and the UN Plaza block of Jones are important neighborhood connectors. The central axis of Fulton Street continues to serve as a major civic promenade from Market Street to City Hall. North-south streets can better unite the district by reducing their crossing distance to ‘stitch’ the major public spaces together. These corridor overlays and functions underpin the design recommendations that follow.

Street Design

Safe and functional streets that define Civic Center

STREET DESIGN IN CIVIC CENTER

The streets and gateways within Civic Center are both monumental and key spaces in which people walk, bike, scoot, transit and drive. As designed, they embody ceremonial routes that speak to the Beaux Arts ambition to create grand routes to and from the city's civic heart and remain largely untouched from their original intent.

History

Established by the Beaux Arts Plan of 1912, over the years the role of Civic Center's streets and gateways has changed. Parking, especially around the Civic Center Plaza's edge, has eroded the historic curb alignment and has created a fragmented and disjointed space. New transit offerings along Van Ness Avenue and UN Plaza have underscored the importance of transit and also access to and from the district's amenities. Additional residential units, families, and cultural institutions have also helped to shape demand for a pleasant pedestrian experience along these streets and gateways.

Safety

Nearly all streets within the Plan Area are classified as Vision Zero High Injury Networks, networks that have been suffering from collisions between vehicles, pedestrian and cyclists that result in death or major injuries. Vision Zero was adopted as policy in 2014 and has committed the City to build better and safer streets, educate the public on traffic safety, enforce traffic laws, and adopt policy changes that save lives. The SFMTA has been implementing safety improvement projects to protect the one million people who move about the city every day, including those in and around Civic Center. This Plan also proposes key street design improvements that further the City's Vision Zero policy and further the safety of San Franciscans.

Key Routes

In addition to their ceremonial nature, the streets, alleys and paseos in Civic Center have key roles in circulation, transportation, and overall experience.

Transit

Within ¼ mile of City Hall, Civic Center streets play host to over 20 Muni transit lines and 50 transit stops, including several on the area's ceremonial streets. Regional transit includes the Civic Center BART station as well as Golden Gate Transit, linking the greater Bay Area.

Walking

Nearly all main streets in the Plan area are classified as Key Walking Streets by the Planning Department's WalkFirst program, including the main Fulton Street axis from Market Street west to City Hall.

Bikes

Within a ½ mile from City Hall, there are 35 bikeways, including 10 class II, 13 class III, and 12 class IV facilities. Currently, Polk, Grove and McAllister Streets provide core N/S and E/W bicycle connections in Civic Center. The Plan proposes conceptual improvements to these bicycle facilities to facilitate safer and more efficient connections through and within Civic Center.

Loading

Civic Center has many unique loading needs. Passengers, performance, and special event loading all take place today, and will be accommodated in the future. Potential street design concepts advanced by this Plan are inclusive of the unique loading needs of civic, institutional, and performing arts organizations within the area.

Parking

While Civic Center is heavily served by local and regional transit, there is a demand for vehicle parking for those visiting and working in the area. Civic Center Garage and the Performing Arts Garage serve much of this demand with street parking available as well. The Plan studies how more efficient access to these parking garages through configuration and circulation changes, with the added benefit of a more pleasant and safer pedestrian experience at the sidewalk level.

Concept Designs

While a long-term vision for Civic Center's major public open spaces was a main focus of the Civic Center Public Realm Plan, long-range ideas for changes to Civic Center's streets were also visioned. The on-the-ground conditions of Civic Center's streets were carefully studied and analyzed, led by an inter-agency team, and redesign concepts were generated for 2 key street corridors, Grove and Polk Streets. The analysis of today's street conditions was extensive, and will be invaluable to future stakeholders, designers, and engineers in guiding and informing future redesign construction projects.

What is presented in this Plan is one potential concept of what the streets and gateways could look like. Before a concept is ready to move forward, additional technical analysis, design workshopping, and stakeholder engagement will be needed, acknowledging that Civic Center's streets should be safe, equitable and extensions of the public realm. Prior to any project approvals, environmental review will need to be conducted in compliance with CEQA.

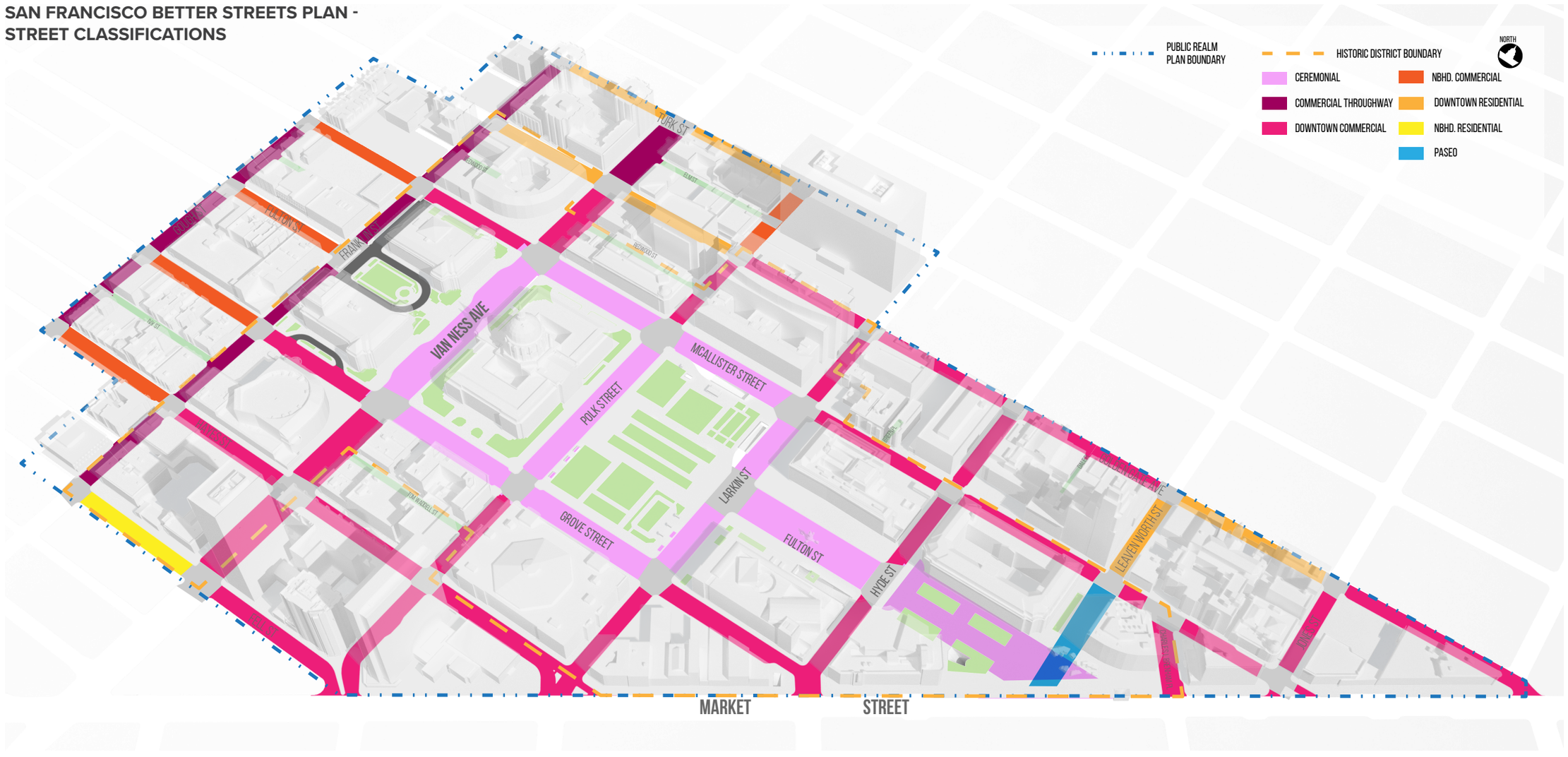
San Francisco's Better Streets Plan

In looking at ways to improve the usability and experience of Civic Center's Streets and gateways, one can turn to the City's Better Streets Plan. San Francisco's policies encourage the design and development of 'Better Streets' – streets that work for all users. A Better Street attends to the needs of people first, considering pedestrians, bicyclists, transit, street trees, stormwater management, utilities, and livability as well as vehicular circulation and parking.

Creating Better Streets can provide significant benefits to San Francisco as a whole including, supporting transit, improving public safety, increasing accessibility, promoting connections to open space, supporting civic and neighborhood interaction, and including everyday quality of life.

The Better Streets Plan has guided the street design recommendations that follow. As you can see the Better Streets Plan defines the streets within the Plan Area as three main types, Ceremonial (the streets in and around City Hall and the main public spaces within the Public Realm Plan Area), Downtown Commercial (the main north/south, east/west thoroughfares) and Alleys/Paseos (the streets that define the fine-grain block structure on the periphery). Other street types such as Downtown Residential define the outer residential and mixed-use neighborhoods.

SAN FRANCISCO BETTER STREETS PLAN - STREET CLASSIFICATIONS



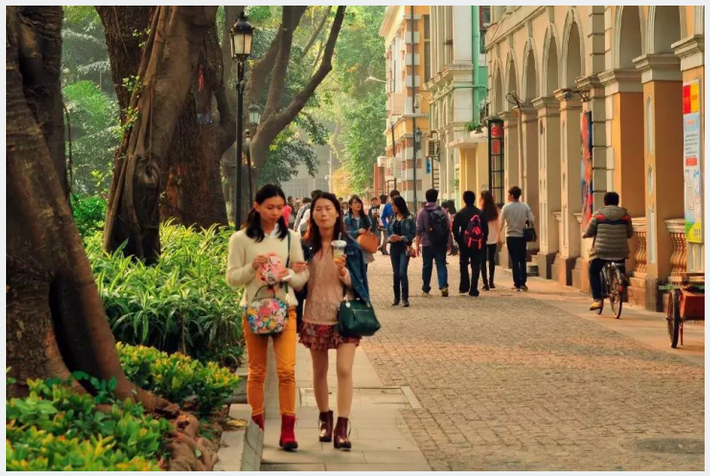
Street Design Goals

ADDRESSING TODAY'S CHALLENGES

The future of Civic Center's streets begins with aspirational goals that acknowledge Civic Center's streets' potential to be world-class and representative of the Beaux Arts framework in which they lie, and reflective of San Francisco's needs and ideals. This includes safety, circulation and flexibility considerations that respond to the many different roles Civic Center plays throughout the year.

The goals for the design of Civic Center's streets were crafted with stakeholder and community input during Workshop 1 in November 2017. The goals are specific to the aspirations and needs for Civic Center's streets and are consistent with the goals developed for Civic Center's open spaces so the designs speak in concert and are mutually supportive of one another.

Civic Center's goals start with **Safety and Comfort**. Safe and comfortable streets are the most critical need, given the poor safety of the area's streets and the City's commitment to Vision Zero. **Connection** is the second goal, as better connections and connectivity follow from a safer public realm, with a focus on pedestrian-priority design that reclaims this civic area for people. A third goal is **Distinctive Identity**. Civic Center's streets strive to be more than just thoroughfares; they should each have a clear and distinctive identity commensurate with Civic Center's distinctive historic, civic and cultural identity.







1 SAFETY AND COMFORT

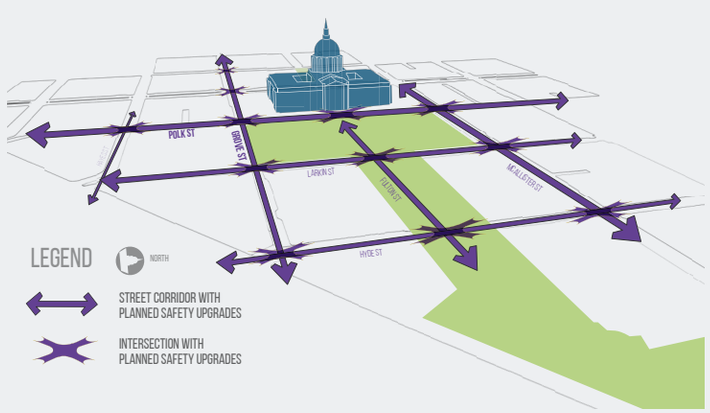
Create safe, comfortable, human-scaled streets that encourage walking and achieve San Francisco's Vision Zero goal to eliminate traffic fatalities by minimizing conflicts between people walking, biking, and driving

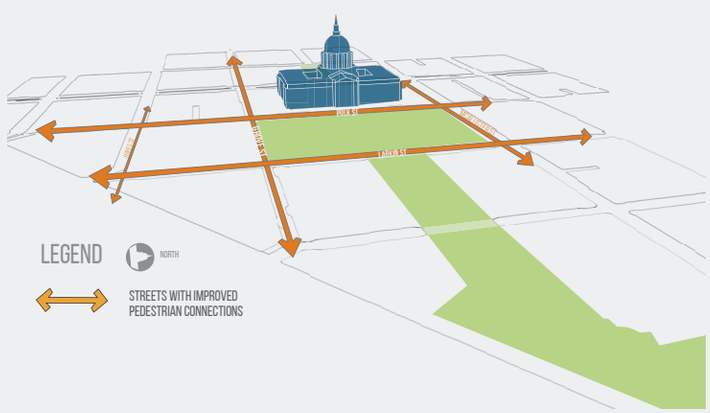
2 CONNECTION

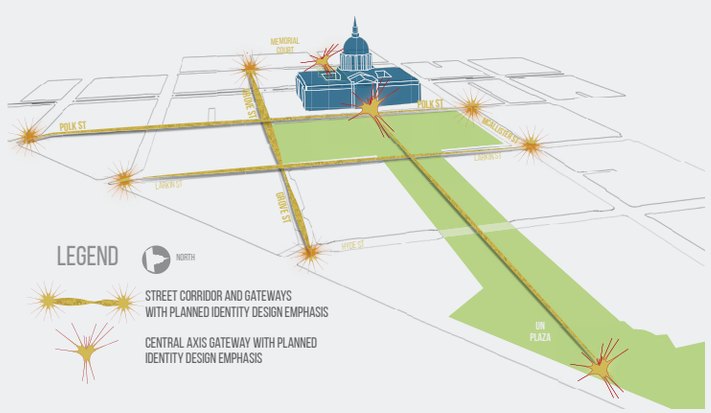
Use pedestrian-priority street design to reduce the physical and visual barriers created by wide roadways that now divide Civic Center's public spaces

3 DISTINCTIVE IDENTITY

Enhance the special character and historic beauty of Civic Center through streetscape materials and amenities that contribute to a memorable district identity







Activation of Civic Center's streets is critical to the success and vitality of these streets functioning as an extension of public spaces. This will contribute to greater feelings of safety and vibrancy. Beyond public realm design; partnerships with stakeholders in key buildings that front the streets are an important part of activating and programming these streets. **Mobility/Operations** is also key to consider. Improved mobility and accessibility for all users, and the unique operational needs of the area's many institutions have to be met. Finally, Civic Center's streets should strive to be living laboratories of **Sustainability** that contribute toward reaching the City's resiliency, biodiversity, and sustainability goals.







4 ACTIVATION

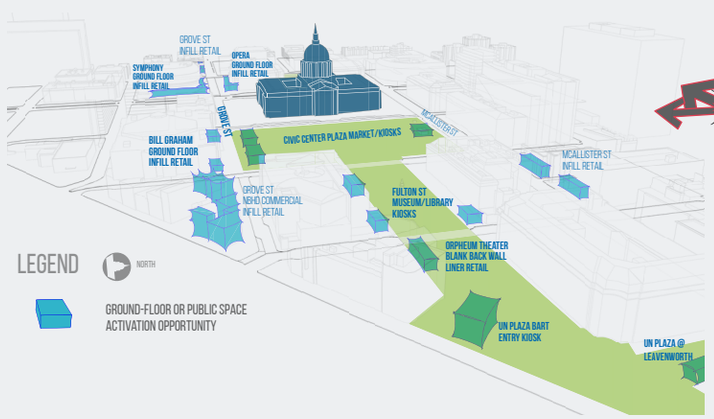
Design sidewalks to complement active adjacent ground floor uses and roadways that can easily convert to pedestrian space during major civic events

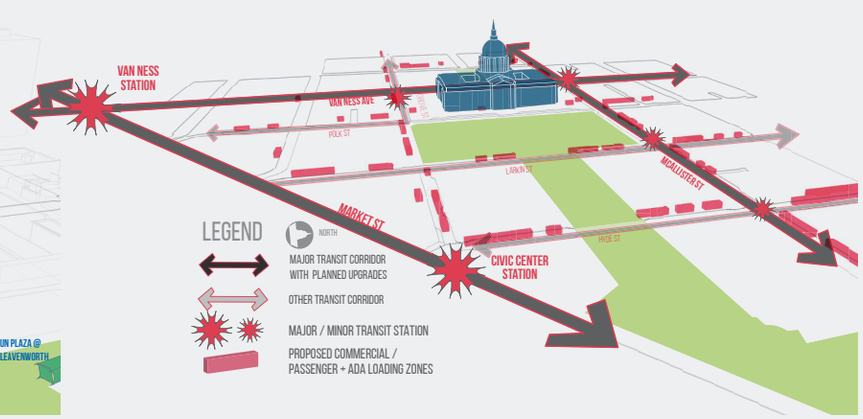
5 MOBILITY/OPERATIONS

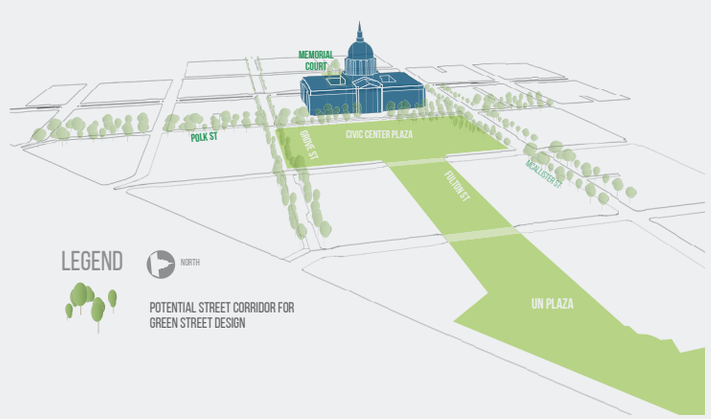
Improve universal accessibility, enhance transit operations and fulfill essential loading needs to ensure efficient access to Civic Center's institutions

6 SUSTAINABILITY

Contribute to San Francisco's sustainability and resiliency goals through additional opportunities for biodiversity, canopy cover, and stormwater management







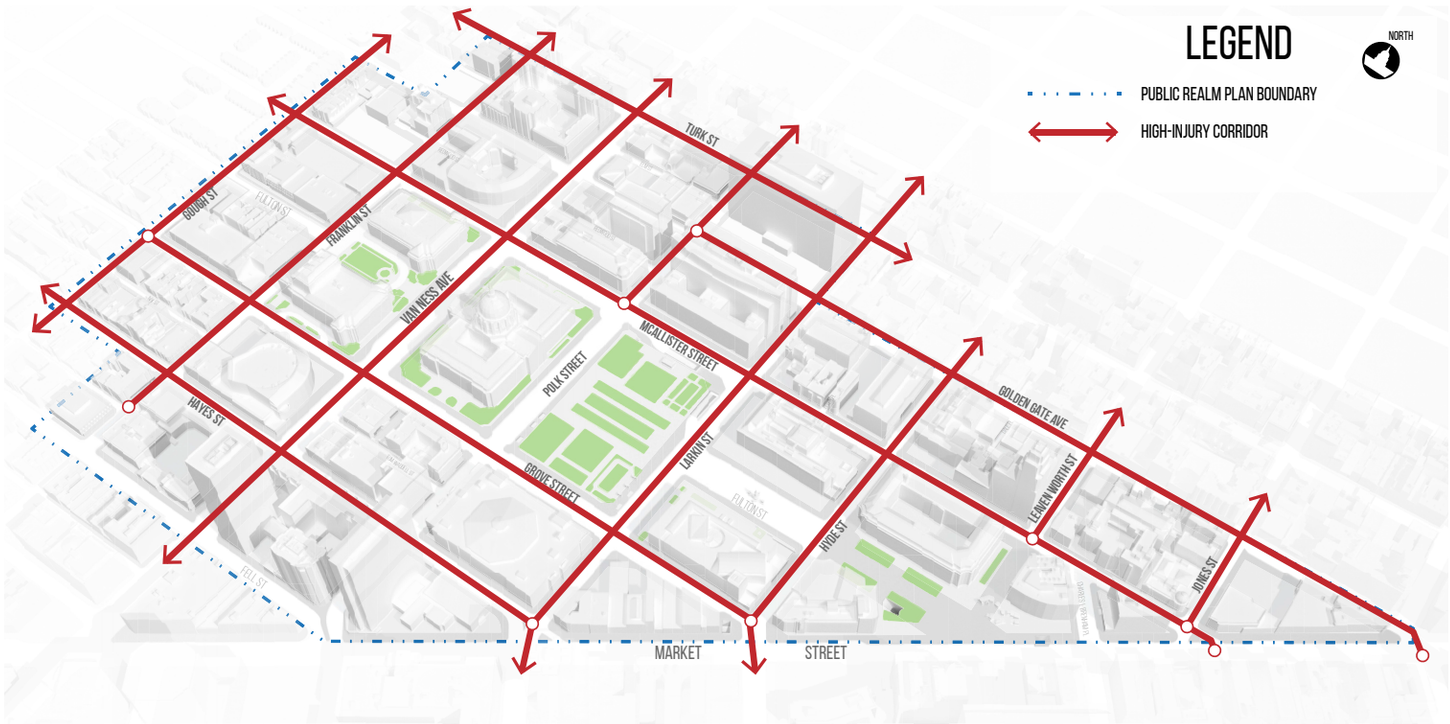
Safety and Vision Zero

SAFETY TODAY

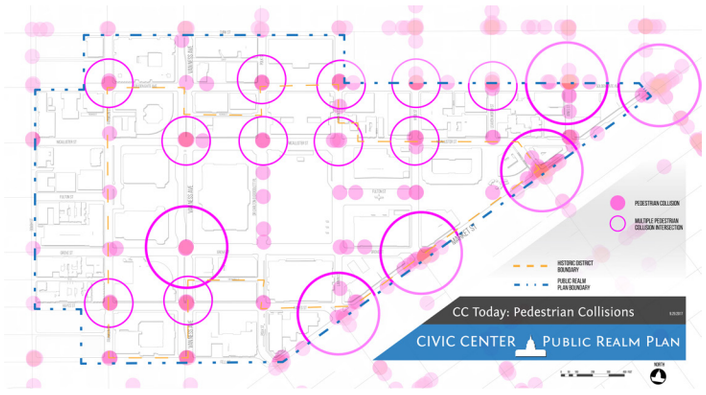
A confluence of historical factors has left Civic Center with a network of dangerous, high-injury streets (severe injury or fatal collisions between pedestrians, bikes and vehicles). Safety conditions can be improved with both targeted design changes to Civic Center's streets. After decades with minimal design changes to Civic Center's streets, major changes are needed to address life safety.

The streets, as currently designed, do not adequately protect from serious injuries and even deaths occurring due to conflicts between modes (e.g.: a vehicle and bike collision). These injuries and deaths have disproportionately impacted those from low-income communities and communities of color. The current street network provides cross-town connections and access to freeways, but does little to prioritize the safety of those immediate to the surrounding neighborhoods that rely on other modes to get around. For example, Gough, Franklin, Larkin, Hyde, Leavenworth, Hayes, Golden Gate and Turk Streets prioritize people driving, while not adequately addressing pedestrian a bike comfort and safety.

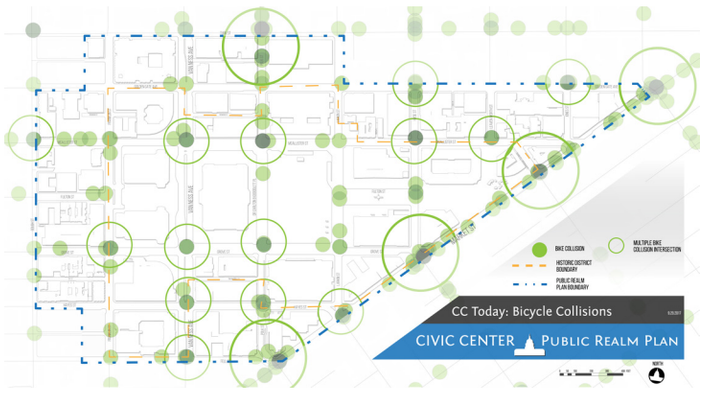
The City has committed to Vision Zero, to eliminate traffic deaths and to reduce severe injuries, and the Civic Center Public Realm Plan advances several concept that will help to mitigate the safety challenges of our most dangerous streets within the Civic Center. This means significant changes to Civic Center's streets at multiple scales. This may include reallocating right-of-way more equitably, changing circulation patterns, graciously accommodating active transportation and other sustainable modes of travel, and giving back space to pedestrians and cyclists.



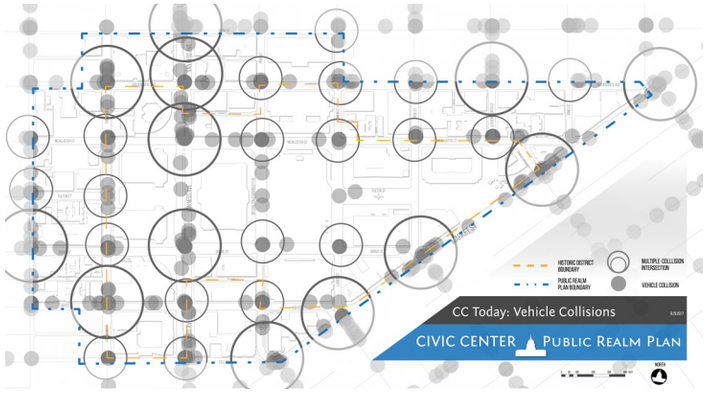
Collisions: People Walking



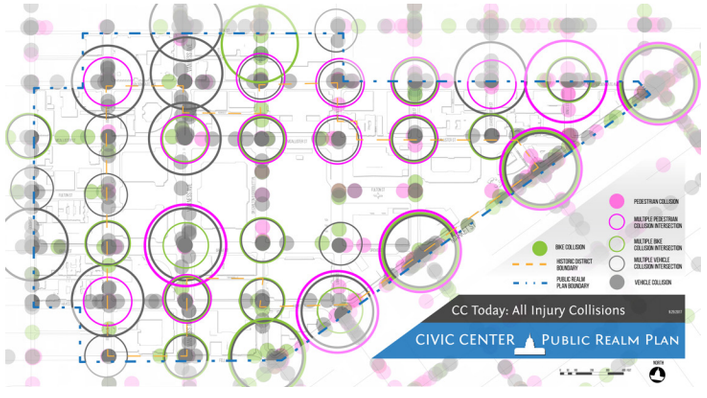
Collisions: People Bicycling



Collisions: People Driving



Collisions: All People, All Modes



Key Sites

RESPONDING TO ADJACENT LAND USES

The identity and function of Civic Center's streets will continue to follow the existing land uses seen today along their frontages. For example, McAllister Street is lined with major government buildings, while Grove Street has a high concentration of key arts and cultural institutions along its length, suggesting a special cultural and civic identity for this underutilized corridor.

The concentration of many important key civic sites and buildings gives these streets a strong identity, however a lack of housing and active ground floor facades results in a street that feels dead outside of work hours. In the context of historic buildings that are limited in their ability to integrate active ground floors and arts venues that have sporadic and punctuated performance times, Civic Center's streets can be very active during peak times, and very dead at other times.

The ceremonial nature of Civic Center's streets, growing out of the original Beaux Arts plan, has resulted in wide streets that can accommodate crowds, but also promote a car-dominated right of way with commensurate safety concerns, many of which involve potentially hazardous mode conflicts and driver-centric design features.



Excess Street Space

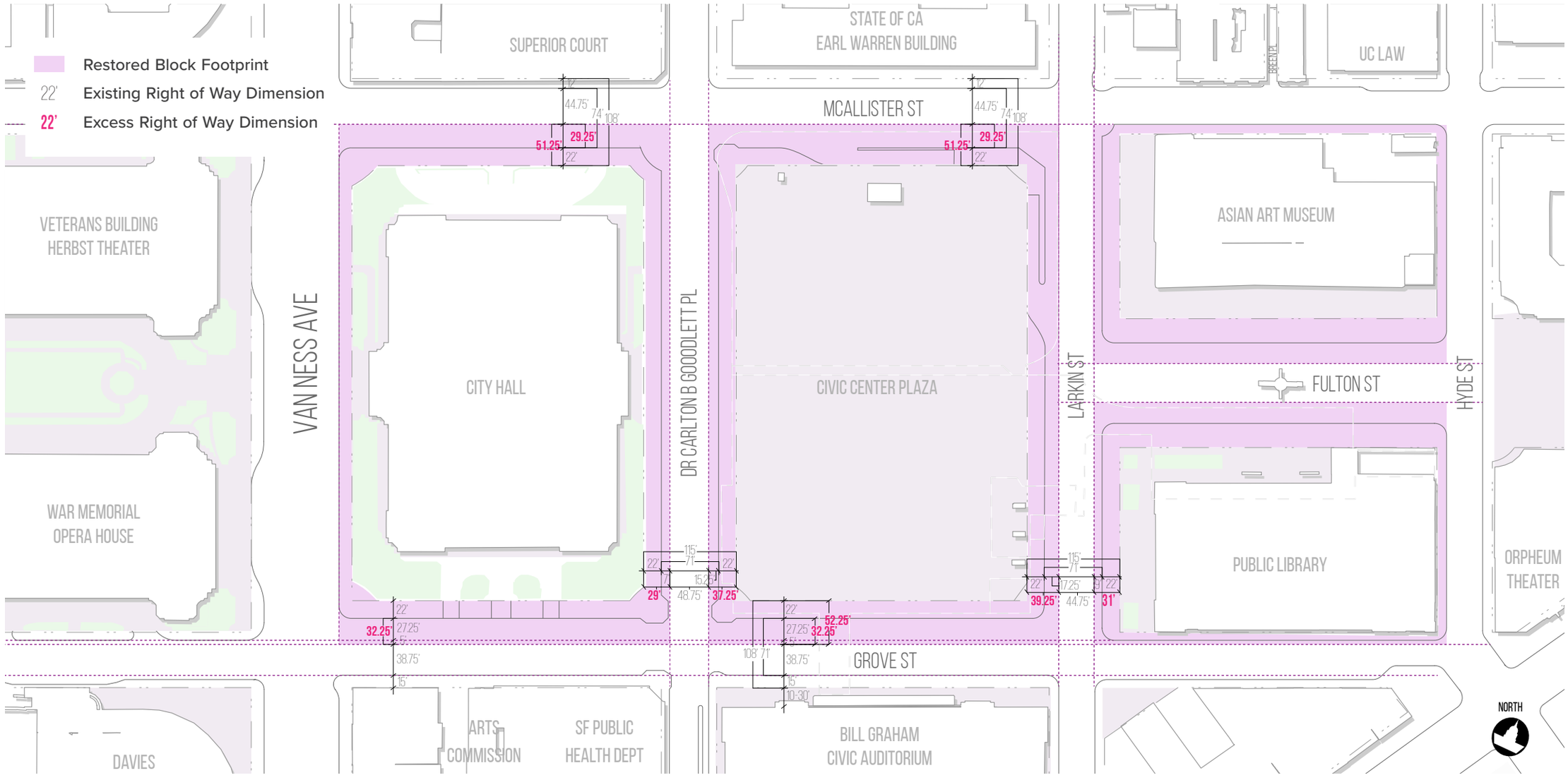
AN OPPORTUNITY FOR BALANCING THE STREET

To achieve the Plan's goals, the Civic Center's core streets, which had been widened long ago, can be reconsidered. The widening of these streets enabled the area to feel more grand and to accommodate large crowds for major events. However, the added width created additional safety challenges including wider crossing distances and faster traffic, creating disconnected blocks and inactive spaces dominated by parking.

Analysis of the City Hall and Plaza blocks indicate that the blocks were shrunk relative to those surrounding them to accommodate wider streets. Grove Street generally is a 69' street with no more than 39' of roadway. However, the Plaza block widens to 108' with 71' of roadway - but without additional vehicle traffic. McAllister Street is generally a 69' wide street with no more than 45' of roadway; with City Hall block widened to a 108' wide with 74' of roadway. The same is true for the single blocks of Polk and Larkin that border the Plaza, where the historic curb alignment has been eroded with angled parking and a wider roadway.

The diagram below illustrates excess right of way that is unused by vehicles, and the potential for re-allocating that back to the public realm.

Reclaiming excess right of way space and restoring block alignments

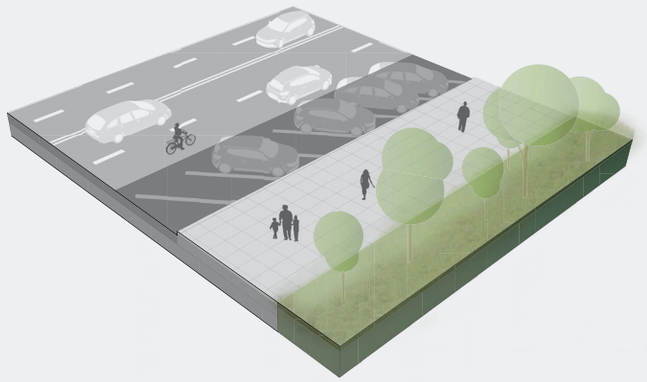


Street Activation: Possibilities

STREET SPACE REUSE CONCEPTS

Civic Center's key streets, especially those surrounding Civic Center Plaza, give opportunity for reclaiming overly-wide rights of way and reapportioning that space for people. Several concepts were developed to help envision what this space could be used for, as seen in the diagrams on this page. They include park expansion, a promenade or multi-use path, and a range of activation possibilities that could be created by new buildings such as kiosks or a market hall, or spaces designed specifically for live events. These concepts were shared with the community at the second public workshop.

Existing: Parking & Driving



Activation: Live Events



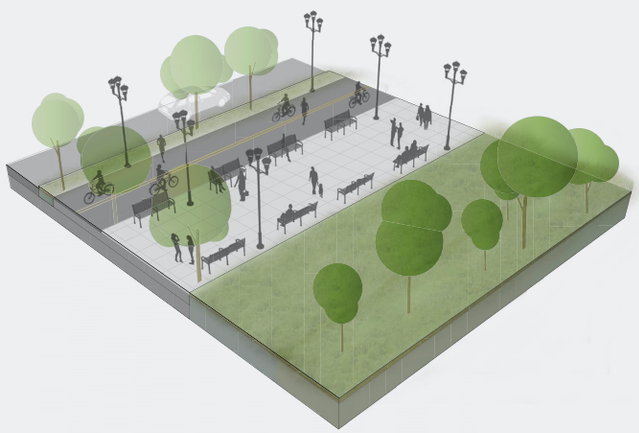
Activation: Market Hall



Activation: Kiosks



Connection: Multi-use Path



Distinctive Identity: Promenade



Safety & Comfort: Park Expansion



STREETS & GATEWAYS - CONCEPTUAL PLAN

Upgrades for Civic Center's streets and gateways

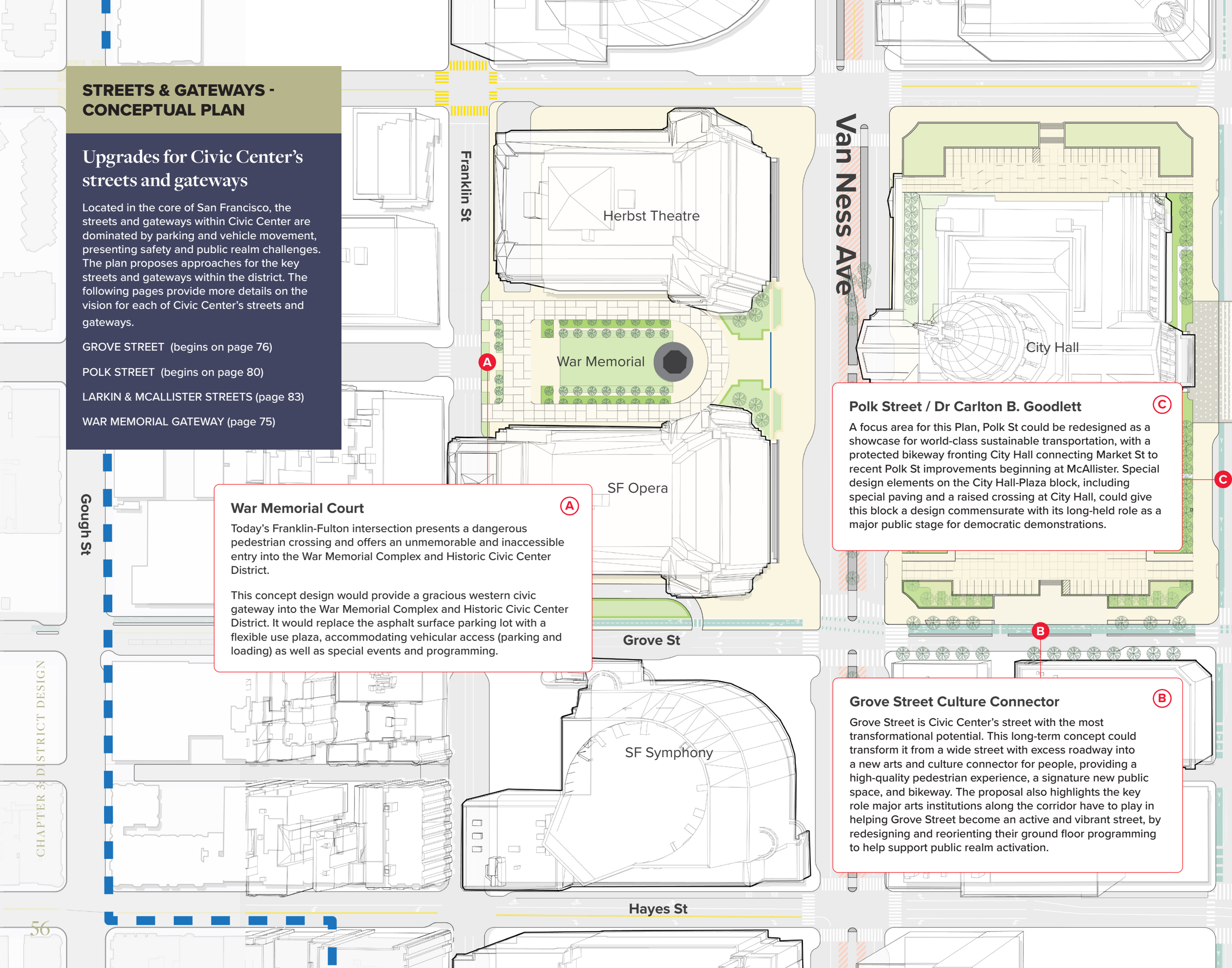
Located in the core of San Francisco, the streets and gateways within Civic Center are dominated by parking and vehicle movement, presenting safety and public realm challenges. The plan proposes approaches for the key streets and gateways within the district. The following pages provide more details on the vision for each of Civic Center's streets and gateways.

GROVE STREET (begins on page 76)

POLK STREET (begins on page 80)

LARKIN & MCALLISTER STREETS (page 83)

WAR MEMORIAL GATEWAY (page 75)



War Memorial Court

A

Today's Franklin-Fulton intersection presents a dangerous pedestrian crossing and offers an unmemorable and inaccessible entry into the War Memorial Complex and Historic Civic Center District.

This concept design would provide a gracious western civic gateway into the War Memorial Complex and Historic Civic Center District. It would replace the asphalt surface parking lot with a flexible use plaza, accommodating vehicular access (parking and loading) as well as special events and programming.

Polk Street / Dr Carlton B. Goodlett

C

A focus area for this Plan, Polk St could be redesigned as a showcase for world-class sustainable transportation, with a protected bikeway fronting City Hall connecting Market St to recent Polk St improvements beginning at McAllister. Special design elements on the City Hall-Plaza block, including special paving and a raised crossing at City Hall, could give this block a design commensurate with its long-held role as a major public stage for democratic demonstrations.

Grove Street Culture Connector

B

Grove Street is Civic Center's street with the most transformational potential. This long-term concept could transform it from a wide street with excess roadway into a new arts and culture connector for people, providing a high-quality pedestrian experience, a signature new public space, and bikeway. The proposal also highlights the key role major arts institutions along the corridor have to play in helping Grove Street become an active and vibrant street, by redesigning and reorienting their ground floor programming to help support public realm activation.

McAllister Street

Leavenworth St

Dr Carlton B. Goodlett (Polk) St

Larkin St

Hyde St

Asian Art Museum

Civic Center Plaza

FULTON STREET MALL

UN Plaza

Public Library

Bill Graham Civic Auditorium

Market St (no existing or future design shown)

McAllister Street Enhancements

D

In addition to a strengthened role as major transit corridor (5-Fulton and 5R Rapid), with transit-priority upgrades, McAllister St, which is overly wide around the Plaza and City Hall, could have additional public space re-allocated from the wide right-of-way; a gracious pedestrian promenade along Civic Center Plaza's north edge; and narrowed intersection crossings and enhanced crossing treatments for safety.

Larkin Street Neighborhood Street

E

Larkin St could be redesigned to strengthen its key role as major neighborhood gateway street. Potential new public space could be reclaimed along Civic Center Plaza from its wide existing right-of-way, creating a gracious pedestrian promenade along the Plaza's east edge, across from the Public Library and Asian Art Museum. Narrowed intersection crossings and new crossing treatments would improve safety.

Hayes Street Access Enhancements

F

A widened north sidewalk along the Bill Graham block of Hayes Street could improve Bill Graham Auditorium's loading operations while also providing a safe and accessible sidewalk for pedestrians.

NORTH

ARCHITECTURE

Civic Center is largely defined by the grand Beaux-Arts buildings at its core, including San Francisco's City Hall. Working in concert with streets and gateways, the district relies on the gravitas of these buildings and provide vital civic, performance and institutional services to San Francisco and the region. The Plan seeks to respect the defining nature and materiality of these grand buildings, while also adapting and introducing contemporary uses that complement existing buildings and enliven the space with more services, round the clock activation, and everyday amenities that serve the neighborhood.

DESIGNING AT THE DISTRICT SCALE: UNIFYING ELEMENTS FOR CIVIC CENTER'S ARCHITECTURE



GROUND FLOOR ACTIVATION

Increase district wide ground-floor activation.



VIEWS + SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Clarify and respect spatial relationships and frame signature views within the plazas and streets.



GROUND + BUILDING INTERFACE

Coordinate design of plazas and streets and existing structures.



IDENTITY

Reinforce a site-specific identity for the main public spaces within a unifying architectural concept.



NEW PROGRAMS AND INVITATIONS

Accommodate new programs and invitations through existing and proposed structures.













The architectural fabric of the district has a large impact on how people use and experience the area's streets and public spaces. Civic Center is recognized as one of the city's most prominent historic districts, and its architecture is one feature many people cherish about the area. While the scale and stately design of Civic Center's architecture is part of what makes the district special, it also contributes to some of the area's most significant design challenges. Meant to behold from a distance, many of the buildings surrounding Civic Center's public spaces provide little visual interest for people walking and can therefore contribute to a sense of the streets and public spaces as cold, harsh, and blown out.

Architectural Context

Architecture impacts streets and public spaces

THE PRICE OF GRANDEUR

Although architectural design is not the primary focus of the Civic Center Public Realm Plan, the architectural fabric has a large impact on how people use and experience the area's streets and public spaces. Architectural context is considered in the existing conditions analysis, and opportunities for architectural interventions are highlighted in detail in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Civic Center is recognized as one of the city's most prominent historic districts, and people cherish the area's grand architecture. Recognized as an official San Francisco Landmark District, Civic Center is one of the most prominent manifestations of the early Twentieth Century "City Beautiful" movement which aimed to bring monumental grandeur to America's cities. Civic Center's Neoclassical public buildings were designed to stand within a harmonious landscape of equally grand public spaces, emphasizing symmetry, signature views, and architectural uniformity. At the time, this design approach was meant to instill faith in democratic government, inspire civic pride, and invite civic gathering. Indeed, Civic Center's public spaces seem to invite one to stand back, look up, and marvel at the buildings. The area's large, open public spaces have been home to countless important civic gatherings over the decades.

While the scale and stately design of Civic Center's architecture is part of what makes the district special, it also contributes to some of the area's most significant design challenges. Meant to behold from a distance, many buildings in the district have few entrances or openings on the ground floor and feature large Beaux-Arts façades with very little transparency. This condition offers little visual interest for people walking through the area, and it contributes to a sense of the streets and public spaces as cold, harsh, and out of scale.

Architecture can contribute to positive use and activation of Civic Center's public spaces, without compromising the area's role as a civic and cultural asset. As Chapter 4, 5, and 6 describe in more detail, the strategy for doing this requires working at two scales:

- First, looking for opportunities for targeted changes to **existing buildings** to improve conditions in adjacent public spaces, especially at the ground floor.
- Second, identifying opportunities to add **new structures** that can host new programs, accommodate new amenities, and enliven Civic Center's public spaces. This approach focuses on the spaces between Civic Center's magnificent buildings to add structures such as kiosks, pavilions or canopies.

Using architecture to support public space goals

Architectural Design proposals aim to support and reinforce the broader urban design goals of the Public Realm Plan. Architectural Design proposals focus on:

- Adding much-needed services such as restrooms and drinking fountains
- Enhancing ground-floor activities.
- Ensuring coordination between existing structures and new designs for streets and public spaces.
- Supporting new programs and amenities.
- Celebrating historic resources and maintaining key design principles, such as the area's signature views.
- Reinforcing a unique identity for each of the three main public spaces, while also contributing to a unified architectural condition and honoring the history of the district.

District: Architecture

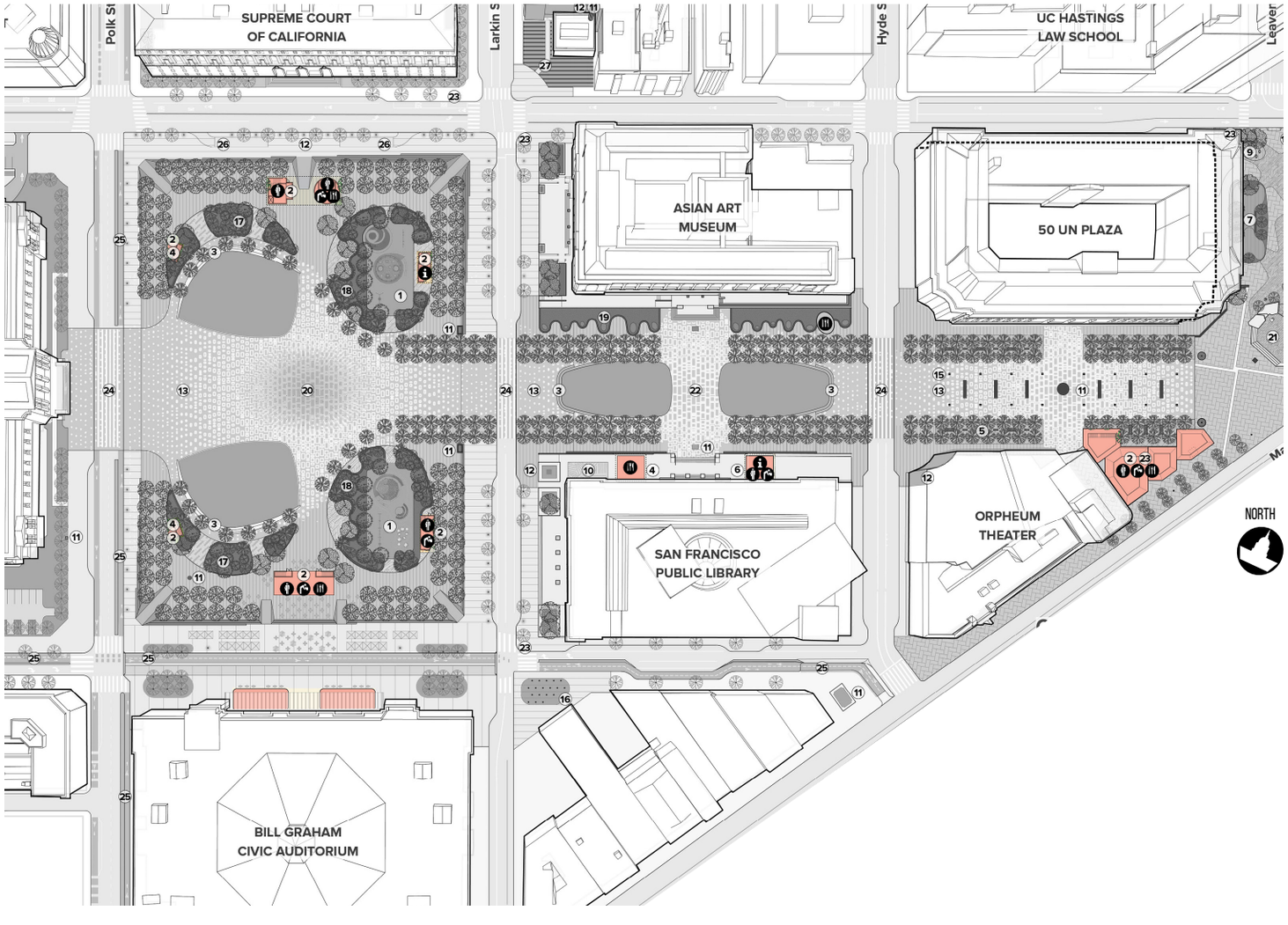
CHARACTER OF NEW DISTRICT ARCHITECTURE

The Civic Center's existing architectural expression is defined by the beautiful Beaux-Arts buildings themselves, rendered in Sierra White granite, with smaller buildings and public structures occurring in the spaces between them. These elements would include kiosks, pavilions, canopies, elevators, stairs, benches, lights, and balustrades.

To help establish new and smaller architectural interventions that would enliven the public realm, the architecture's proposed material and style is rooted in the older buildings and their European precedents. Specific inspiration is drawn from the steel skeletons that support their masonry facades, and the sheet-metal and glass enclosures that keep the weather out. The notable 19th and early 20th century train-stations, exhibition halls, and libraries of Europe and America celebrated this contrast between stone, steel and glass - between the forces of compression and tension. In San Francisco's Civic Center, this is seen in the dome and light-courts of City Hall, the original glass and copper roof of the Civic Auditorium, and its electrified iron and glass marquee.

Recognizing homage to the historic material and fabric established by the Beaux Arts Plan and the need for contemporary and active uses, particularly at the ground floor, the proposed architectural interventions are bound together by a material DNA of stone, steel, glass, and zinc, with liners of wood or tile. Each material is handled in a manner that evokes beaux-arts craft: Stone set as blocks to form anchoring bases; steel structures comprised of built-up flange sections mechanically fastened; roofs of standing seam patinated zinc and glass; and interior ceilings of oak wood or terra cotta.

The concepts presented within this Plan are only one potential possibility for what these kiosks, entrances, and intermediate buildings could look like. Greater technical analysis and detailed design would be undertaken in collaboration with City agencies, commission, the community and other stakeholders to refine proposals for environmental review, project approval, and implementation.



New architecture, including kiosks, station buildings and entrances are rooted in the Beaux Arts style, including materiality and structure but satisfy the contemporary demands of the area. Each of the three main public spaces would have a unique architectural theme, but would carry a common district-wide design that honors the existing grand buildings that set the framework of these spaces.

FACADE QUALITY TODAY

The buildings in Civic Center are generally defined by long, inactive façades with few entries and little transparency at the ground floor. During the 2018 Civic Center Public Space & Public Life Study, surveyors ranked the quality of facades within the Public Realm Plan area. The results of this analysis are illustrated in the map below.

A pattern of dark blue inactive, low-quality, facades is apparent on the “back sides” of many large institutional and cultural buildings at the core of the district. Rather than serving as welcoming gateways, these blocks can feel like abandoned fortresses that make traveling to the heart of Civic Center from surrounding neighborhoods feel less pleasant and safe.



Vibrant
- Small units with many doors
- High transparency
- No vacant or passive units
- Lots of character
- Good articulation, materials and details



Active
- Relatively small units
- Some transparency
- Few passive units
- Some articulation and detail



Dull
- Large units with few doors
- Low transparency
- Some Passive Units
- Few or no details



Inactive
- Large units with few doors
- Very little or no transparency
- Uniform facades with no details or nothing to look at
- Parking or vacant lot





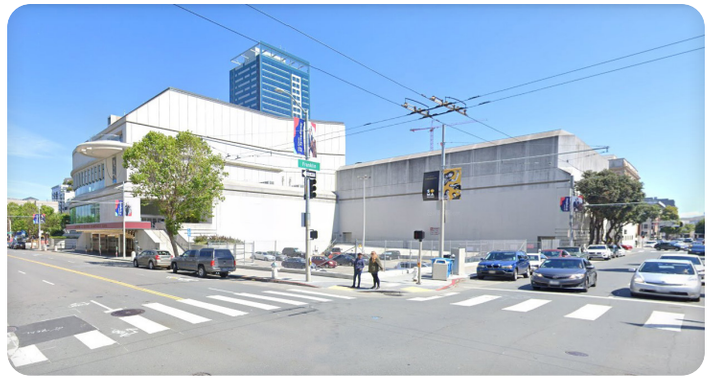
Enlivening Building Edges With Small-Scale Projects

Temporary projects can enhance people’s experience of using public space. Middle Ground – an interactive installation created by the Exploratorium and installed on the Larkin Street terrace of the SF Public Library Main Branch building - featured over a dozen unique exhibits about social psychology, exploring topics such as implicit bias, sharing, and competition. Exhibits were designed to encourage people to stop, learn, and interact, and they were positioned to work in synergy with the weekly Step Sale events organized at the site by the Friends of the San Francisco Public Library. Colorful tables and chairs around the exhibit columns helped transform the often-vacant terrace into a lively public gathering space, and brought the spirit of learning and inquiry from within the library out into the public realm. The project made a post-pandemic return in 2023-2024 on the Library’s Fulton Street terrace.

FACADE OPPORTUNITIES

The quality of space in Civic Center is highly influenced by the quality of the building edges that surround it.

To support improved public life and more attractions and amenities, the Plan proposes activating building edges where possible. The map below illustrates key opportunities, which have influenced the architectural design proposals in the pages ahead.

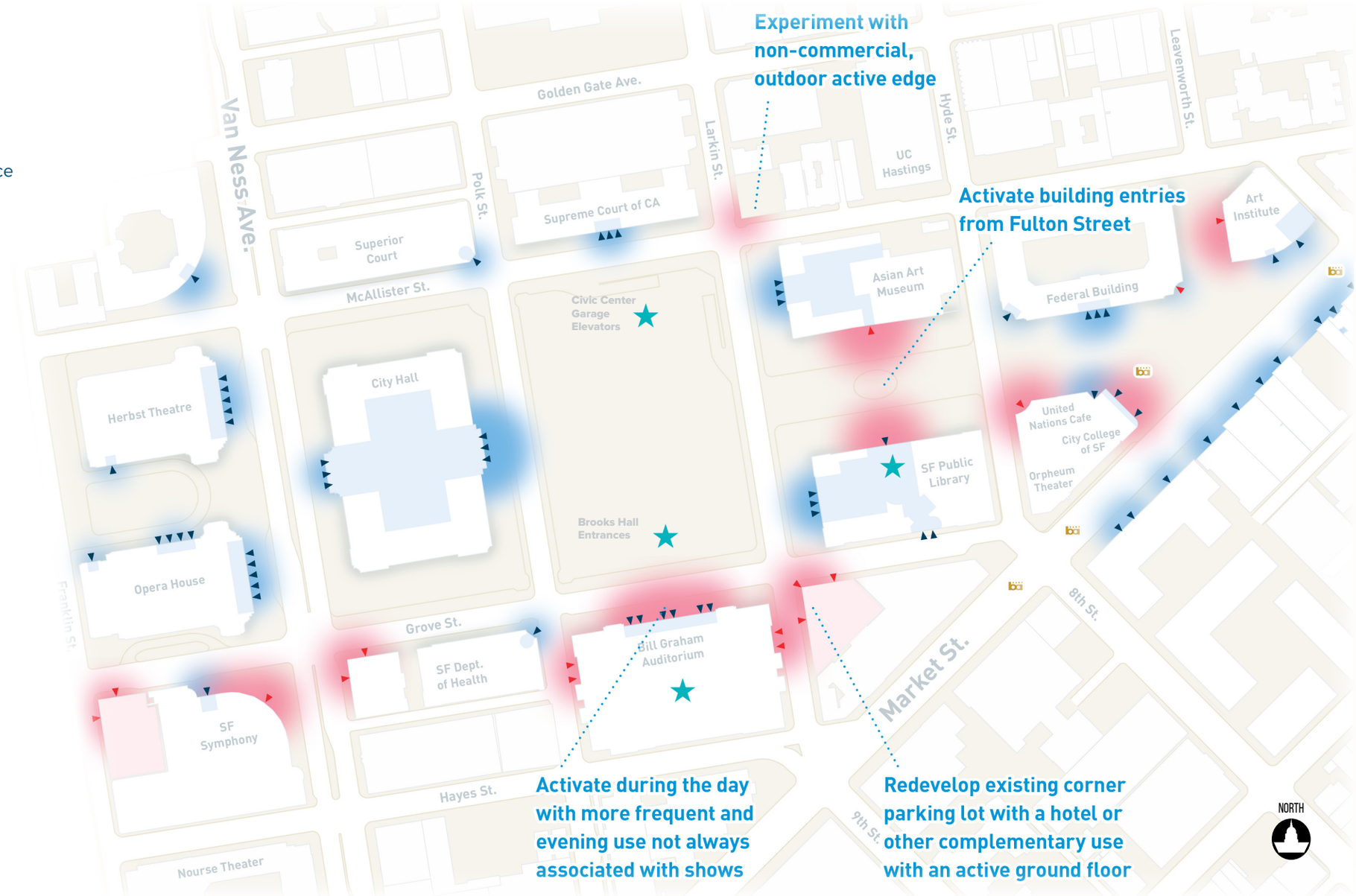




The south side of Grove Street is one example where the lack of transparent, active ground-floor uses negatively impacts the public realm. Active uses at key locations – such as along the blank walls and parking lot of the back of the SF Symphony building and in the empty plaza at Grove and Larkin – would go a long way in enhancing conditions along the Grove Street arts corridor.

KEY FACADE OPPORTUNITIES

- Existing entrance
- Existing active edge
- Publicly-accessible interior space
- New entrance opportunity
- Potential new active edge
- Case study in the pages ahead

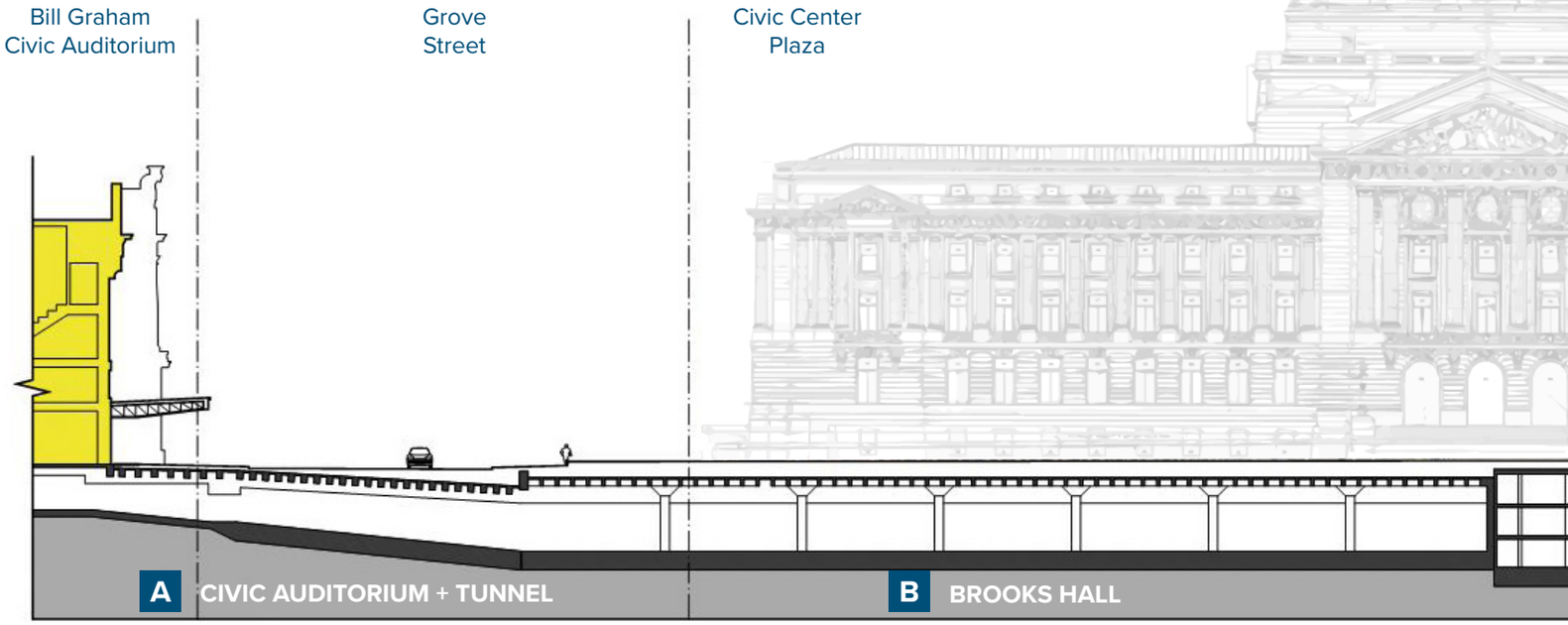


Civic Center's Underground World

A vast network of interconnected subterranean spaces lies beneath Civic Center's core. The use and design of entrances to these underground areas have a major impact on the public spaces above.

Civic Center Plaza is actually the roof of two below-ground structures: Brooks Hall and the Civic Center Parking Garage. These two large facilities are connected to the basements of Bill Graham Civic Auditorium and the Main Library via tunnels beneath Civic Center's streets.

The presence of these below-ground facilities presents both challenges and opportunities for Civic Center's public realm. Structural issues with Brooks Hall and the Parking Garage complicate any improvements to the structures themselves, or to Civic Center Plaza above. For example, any future re-use of Brooks Hall or any major design overhaul of the plaza will need to first weigh in the considerable cost of seismic retrofits and other upgrades to the structures below. While retrofits would be costly and complex, these facilities also present a major opportunity – adjustments to their design and/or use can compliment and enliven the plaza above. For example, entrances and exits could become hubs of activity and offer new amenities for the plaza. The connection between Civic Center's subterranean and above ground spaces is one major factor that has shaped both public space and architectural design proposals. The Planning process identified the needed seismic upgrades and costs to bring Civic Center's underground facilities up to current code. The City will continue to study how and when these upgrades could take place.





A

BILL GRAHAM CIVIC AUDITORIUM + TUNNEL

Built in 1915, the Civic Auditorium was the city's first convention facility, and it is connected to Brooks Hall via a tunnel that runs beneath Grove Street. The tunnel is no longer in public use, but the Civic Auditorium is a major entertainment venue whose design and programming impacts Civic Center's public life. In particular, the Grove Street building facade has a strong relationship to the adjacent edge of Civic Center Plaza.

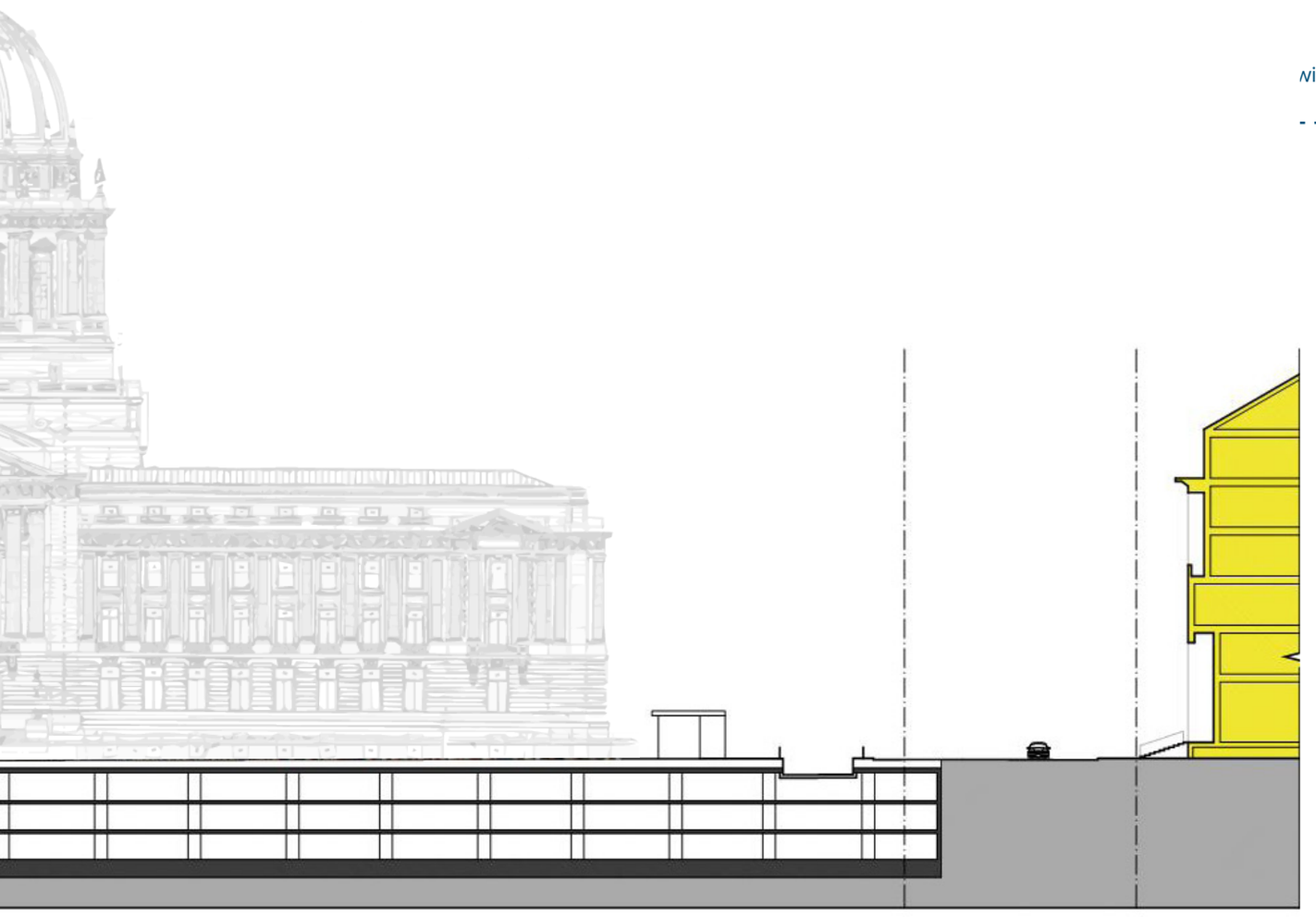


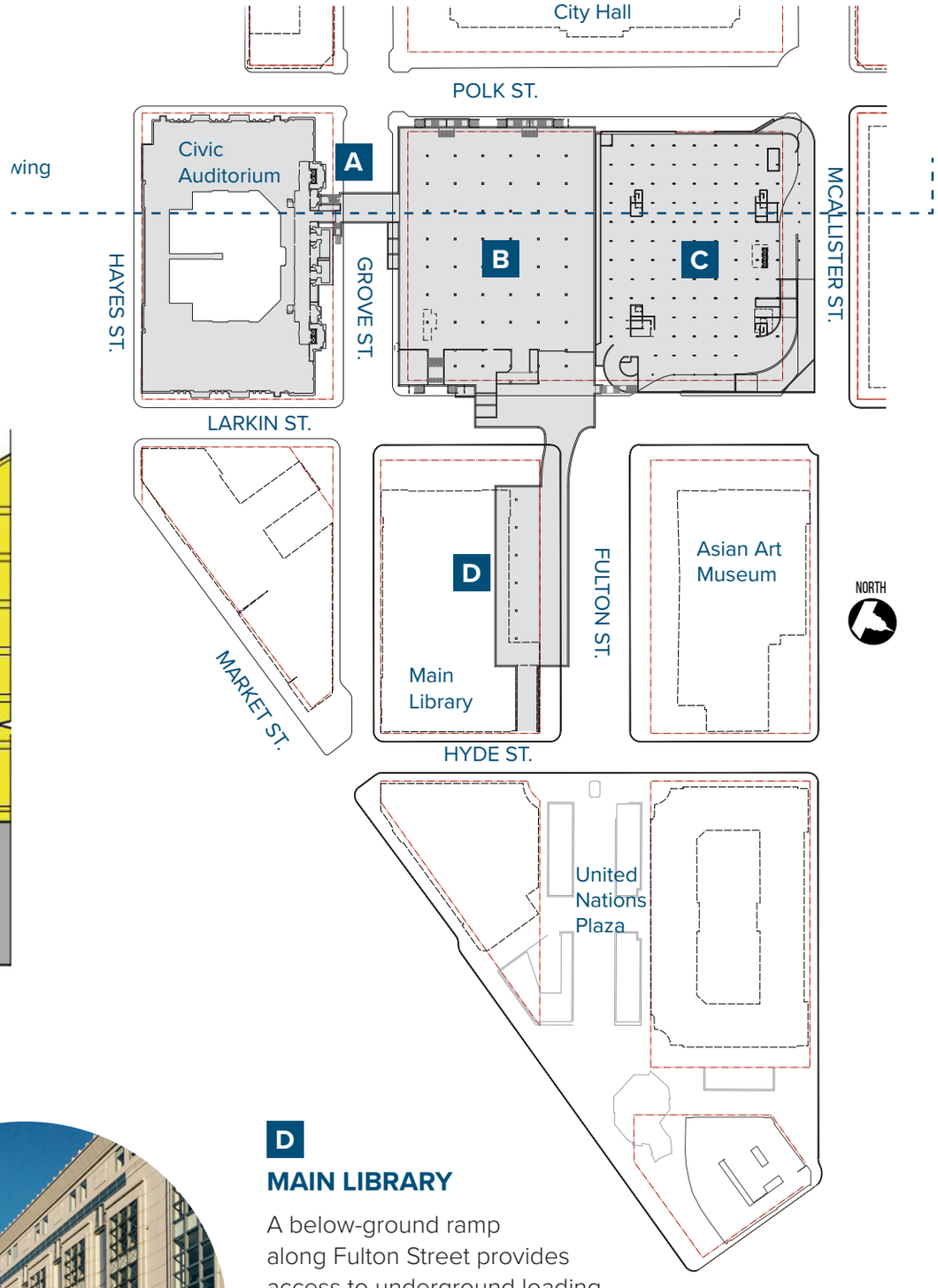
B

BROOKS HALL

Brooks Hall is a 90,000 square foot City-owned convention hall that was in operation from 1958 until 1993. The facility was closed during construction of the new Main Library and never reopened to public use due to the cost associated with bringing it up to modern building codes. It is currently used for storage by various City departments but could be re-purposed for a new public use with seismic upgrades.

PLAN VIEW OF UNDERGROUND STRUCTURES







C

CIVIC CENTER PARKING GARAGE

The Civic Center Parking Garage opened in 1960. Although directly adjacent to Brooks Hall, the two structures were built independently of one another. The elevator building and ramps that connect the garage to the plaza above are a key area where design changes could make Civic Center Plaza a more inviting public space.



D

MAIN LIBRARY

A below-ground ramp along Fulton Street provides access to underground loading and service areas for the library as well as Brooks Hall. The patio that covers the ramp provides one entrance to the library building off of Fulton Street. This patio area could be enhanced through targeted architectural interventions, discussed in the pages ahead.

Below the Surface: Subterranean Challenges and Design Responses

Seismic Considerations

As part of the Civic Center Public Realm Plan's existing conditions analysis, Structus Inc, a structural engineering firm, was hired to conduct a seismic analysis of both structures beneath Civic Center Plaza: Brooks Hall and the Civic Center Parking Garage. This analysis was a critical first step in understanding what architectural changes might be possible in these underground areas and at the entrances/exits that connect them to the public spaces above.

Brooks Hall and the Civic Center Parking Garage were analyzed for performance under two types of seismic events as defined by American Society of Civil Engineers. As a conservative baseline, the analysis considered what would happen in the case of a magnitude-8 earthquake event along a major fault line near the site.

Brooks Hall Seismic Analysis Findings

The structural analysis concluded that in case of a major seismic event, it is likely that the existing structure would sustain significant structural damage. This means that the Brooks Hall structure and the portion of Civic Center Plaza over Brooks Hall would have to be closed until repair or reconstruction is complete.

Civic Center Parking Garage Seismic Analysis Findings

The structural analysis concluded that in the case of a major seismic event, it is likely that Civic Center Garage structure, including large areas of existing concrete walls at lower levels, would also sustain significant damages and have to be closed for repair and/or reconstruction.

How Seismic Analysis Findings Impact Design

Civic Center Plaza is likely to be used as a staging area for emergency response – it is considered critical to the City's overall emergency response for the area. Since the plaza is supported by Brooks Hall and Civic Center Garage, the structural integrity of these two structures is essential for the life safety of nearby building evacuees and emergency response activities. Thus, any major overhaul of the plaza will likely need to be done in tandem with seismic and structural improvements to the structures below. And, any future changes to the design or use of underground structures will have to take seismic considerations into account.



Subterranean Access and HVAC Infrastructure

Below grade uses require points of access and egress that effect the urban design of the plaza. These can be seen as opportunities for plaza activation as in the case of the Parking Garage, or with Brooks Hall Re-use scenarios. Conversely, existing egress points and infrastructure facilities that are currently on the plaza, can be coordinated and hidden within pavilions or small-scale buildings in the future.

Brooks Hall: Re-use Opportunities

Working with HR&A Advisors, three re-use scenarios for Brooks Hall were tested to understand their economic viability and their impact on the Plaza above. All three scenarios considered a mix of uses for this large space, blending retail, civic, event, and food and beverage uses. Each scenario had varied impacts on the design of the Plaza, depending on the size of required fire egress stairs, and mechanical ventilation needs. For example, if Brooks Hall were to be used for large-scale public events, this would require significant exit capacity on the plaza above. Or, if it contained major food and beverage-related uses, the need for ventilation infrastructure on the plaza above would be greater.

There are many unknowns that impact future use of Brooks Hall, such as seismic upgrades, the long time frame to implementation, and evolving needs and market conditions. So, while re-use of Brooks Hall is an exciting opportunity, it is important that Brooks Hall uses are considered in context of the public vision for the design of Civic Center Plaza, and not the other way round. The public space design put forth in the Plan responds directly to community input and prioritizes designs and amenities desired by a diverse range of stakeholders. The proposed plaza design would allow for the following in re-using Brooks Hall in the future, based primarily on exit width capacity limitations:

- 4,000 square feet of retail and food and beverage space,
- 14,000 sf Community Center including meeting and fitness facilities
- 24,000 sf of City offices,
- 3,200 sf for Dept of Parks and Rec office and operations hub
- 4,900 sf of City storm water infrastructure
- 24,500 sf of City storage.

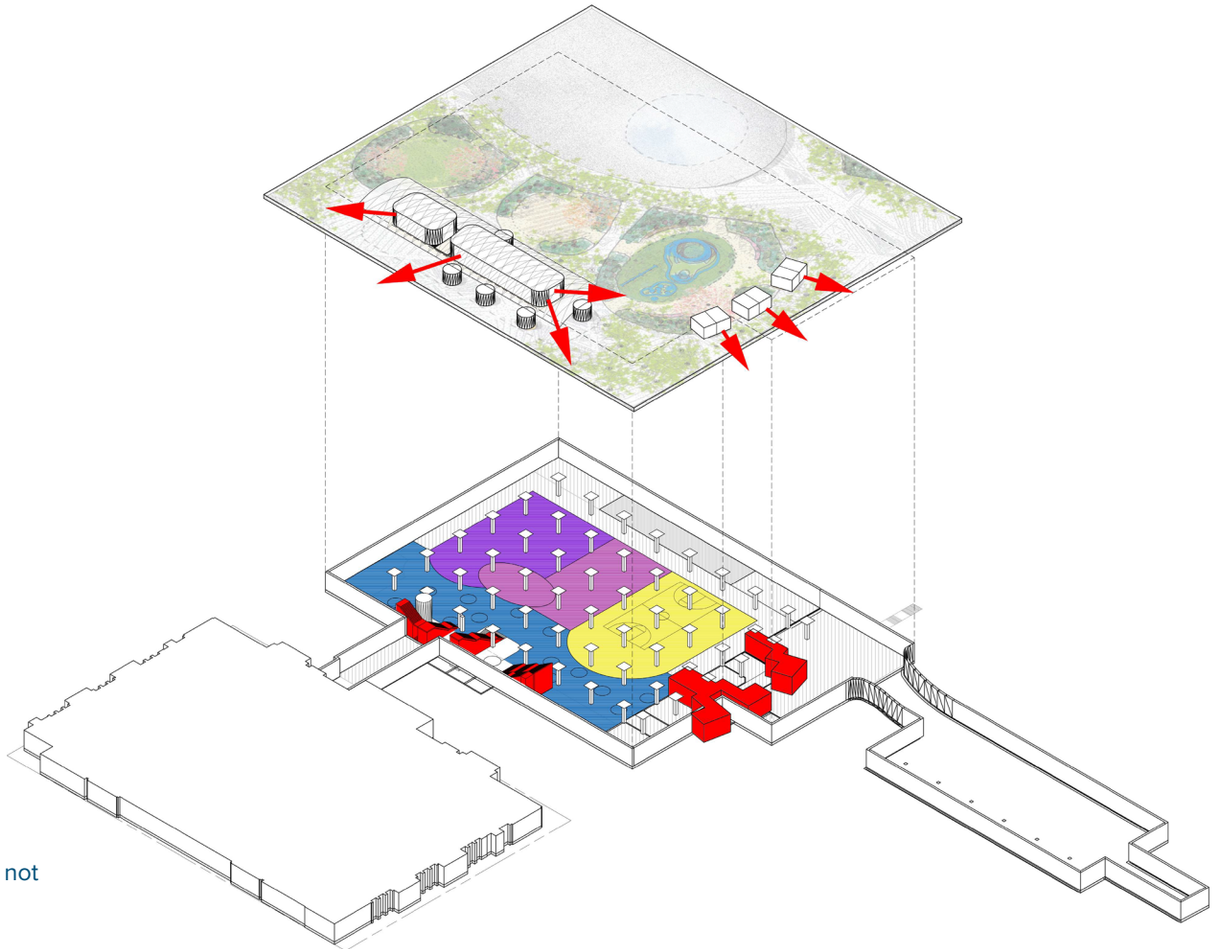
This is just one potential use scenario, but many others are possible, assuming egress and ventilation assumptions associated with the uses above are not exceeded. For example, it is possible some portion of Brooks Hall could be used for services for high-need populations, such as people experiencing homelessness, should there be a need for this in the future.

Civic Center Parking Garage: Re-Thinking Ramp and Entry Points

The Civic Center Parking Garage provides parking for many uses in the area, including nearby civic and cultural buildings. And, the design of garage elements – both the elevator building and the entrance and exit ramps – have an impact on how people experience the plaza above.

The existing elevator enclosure provides protection from the elements, but it offers few other amenities. And, stairs and mechanical vents for the garage that are scattered throughout the plaza could be consolidated to free up space for desired public uses. This elevator structure could be redesigned as an attractive pavilion that consolidate stairs and vents and offers much more to people using the plaza, such new elevators, public bathrooms, water fountains, and a small café.

Another major opportunity can be seen at the wide access ramps to the garage along McAllister and Larkin Streets. Ingress and egress ramps along McAllister Street could be thinned and reconfigured to feed into a central drive aisle. This layout opens up possibilities for design of the plaza – it accommodates the broad steps and framing allees of trees that can be seen in the renderings and concept plans throughout this document. While moving the ramps, and consolidating the stairs and vents required rethinking the below-grade vehicle circulation. For additional details and a diagram of garage ramp reconfiguration proposals, please see Chapter 4.



Uses of underground spaces are strongly connected to the design of Civic Center's public spaces, due to requirements around fire egress and ventilation for various below-ground uses. For example, if Brooks Hall below Civic Center Plaza were to be used for large-scale public events, this would require significant exit capacity on the plaza above. Or, if it contained major food and beverage-related uses, the need for ventilation infrastructure on the plaza above would be greater. The diagram above shows a conceptual illustration for how below-ground uses are connected to above-ground public space designs. (Note, the diagram on the right is intended only to communicate the concept of how above and below ground uses are connected, and does not reflect a finalized proposal for the use of Brooks Hall.)

ARCHITECTURE - CONCEPTUAL PLAN

Honoring historic architecture

The district is defined by gracious Beaux Arts buildings constructed of sierra granite, steel and glass. New structures that support amenities and activations within the main public spaces are appropriate for contemporary uses and will honor and reference the historic architecture that surrounds them. Several design concepts are advanced by this Plan as ideas for how this would be accomplished. The following pages provide more details on the vision for each of Civic Center's architectural interventions.

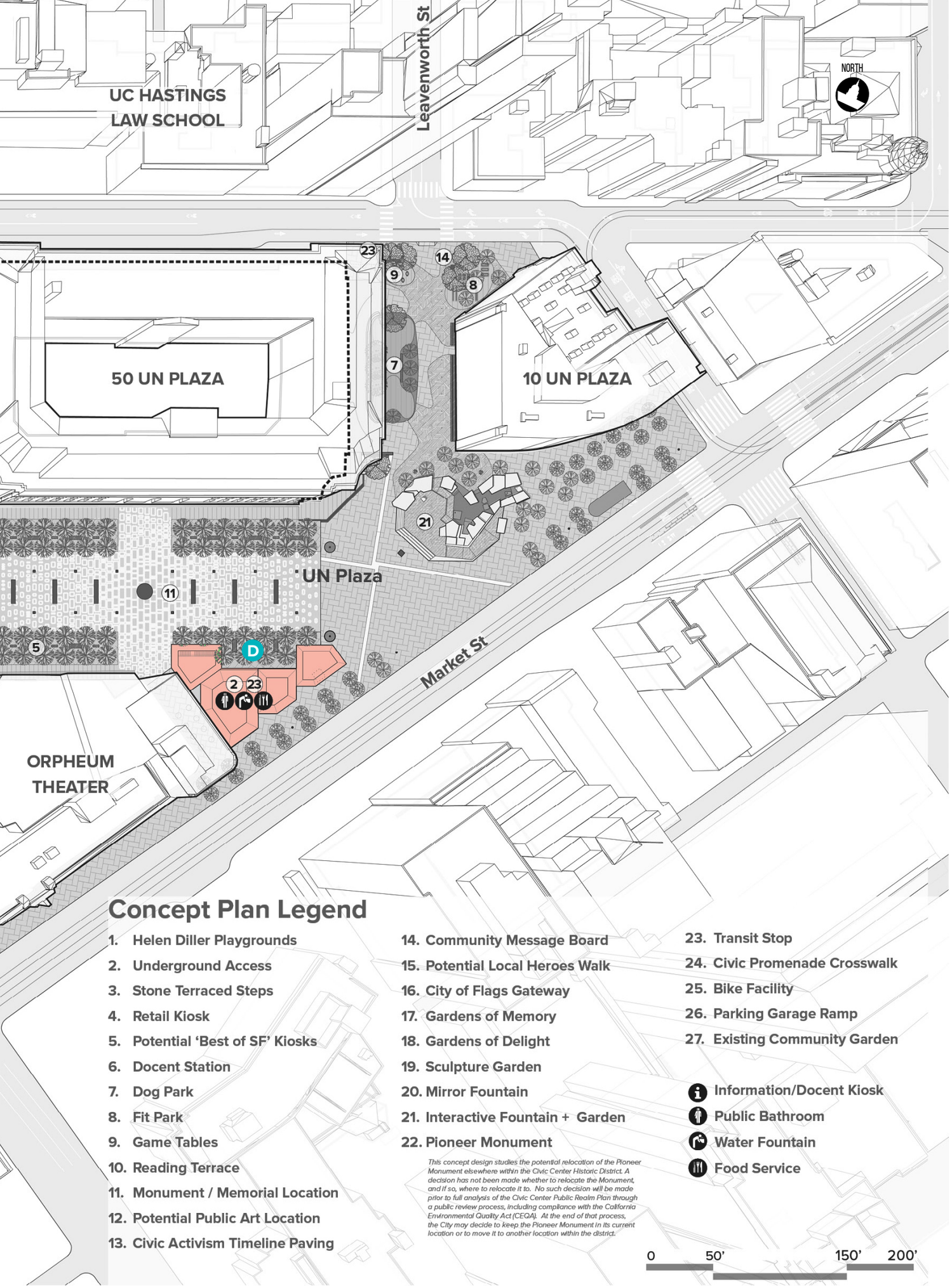
Proposed concepts will require CEQA and project approvals. This will likely include consideration by the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) and may require a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA).

CIVIC CENTER PLAZA KIOSKS
(begins on page 84)

BILL GRAHAM ENHANCEMENTS
(begins on page 86)

FULTON MALL ENTRANCE KIOSKS
(begins on page 96)

UN PLAZA STATION BUILDING
(begins on page 106)



A CIVIC CENTER PLAZA KIOSKS

Civic Center Plaza is the roof of both the Civic Center Parking Garage and Brooks Hall. Today, people come and go from the parking garage elevator structure near McAllister, and if Brooks Hall were re-purposed, there would need to be enhanced public entrances to below ground areas on the Grove side of the plaza as well. These entrances could become attractive beacons that offer amenities to support public use in new lawns and paved and landscaped areas. In this area, the Plan proposes a series of new structures: small-scale kiosks for public restrooms, water fountains, and small cafe or retail uses. Kiosks would be designed with materials that complement existing historic buildings, and they would be placed to highlight existing signature views across the plaza. *See page 84 for more details.*

B BILL GRAHAM CIVIC AUDITORIUM ENHANCEMENTS

Bill Graham Civic Auditorium has a large impact on Civic Center's public spaces. This iconic venue occupies an entire city block along Civic Center Plaza. It draws large crowds when performances and events are occurring but is otherwise barricaded from the street with predominantly blank frontages. To activate the ground floor on a more regular basis, the Plan takes a targeted approach to adding retail pavilions and a renewed marquee. *See page 86 for more details.*

C FULTON MALL ENTRANCE KIOSKS

The Public Realm Plan proposes to transform Fulton Street into a new public space with flexible lawn and paving panels for a wide array of programmatic uses. The architecture of the museum and library buildings would have a strong impact on how this new public space area functions, and strategic changes to these existing buildings could support healthy and active public life between them. For example, the library's building edge could feature small pavilions for public restrooms, information kiosks, a cafe with space to read and socialize, and a home base for Civic Center's stewards and ambassadors. *See page 96 for more details.*

D CIVIC CENTER/UN PLAZA STATION BUILDING

The Civic Center/UN Plaza station has some of the highest transit ridership numbers in San Francisco. The Plan proposes a larger architectural intervention at this location: a two-story station building above the existing escalator opening. The building would be designed to support existing uses like the Heart of the City Farmers' Market, offer community amenities and assembly space, and act as a resilience hub for the surrounding neighborhoods. *See page 106 for more details.*

CHAPTER 4
CIVIC CENTER PLAZA

Site-Specific Proposals: Civic Center Plaza

APPROACH + CONSIDERATIONS

The largest and most visible public space in the district, Civic Center Plaza has long been the civic and political heart of San Francisco. The Plaza is associated with a number of historically significant events, including the House Un-American Activities Committee Protests, LGBTQ Pride Parades, and the AIDS Candlelight March. Thousands of people gather here for celebrations and protests of all sizes. The Plan seeks to support and amplify the plaza's crucial civic and ceremonial function, while serving the needs of everyday users, such as families living in adjacent neighborhoods.

Built for the 1915 Pan Pacific International Exposition, the plaza was designed according to a Beaux-Arts Plan which featured a large central gathering plaza framed by civic buildings and large fountains, with intimate lawns and gardens at the Plaza's four corners. Two rows of perimeter trees helped define the plaza, and gateway elements such as sculptures marked entrances. Incremental changes to the original Beaux-Arts Plan over the last 50 years have shaped the design we see there today. Key features such as benches, perimeter trees, and plantings were stripped away. Wide ceremonial streets around the Plaza, became dangerous car-centric streets, surrounding the Plaza with angled parking on all four sides, and further fragmenting pedestrian access with two oversized garage access ramps along McAllister and Larkin Streets. Collectively, these changes made the Plaza increasingly inhospitable, uncomfortable, and bleak.

Additions such as the renovated Helen Diller Civic Center Playgrounds, the Café Kiosk and other new amenities brought life and delight back to the Plaza prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. While these activations have had to adjust to the pandemic, the plaza remains an important open space for many. The Plan seeks to address the physical challenges of the Plaza, honor the ambitions of the 1912 Beaux-Arts Plan, deliver quality open space to surrounding neighborhoods, and build on the success of recent investments. The map on the following page provides several highlights of design proposals.



CIVIC CENTER PLAZA: EARLY 1900'S



Today: Amenities such as the Café Kiosk (image by CCCBD)



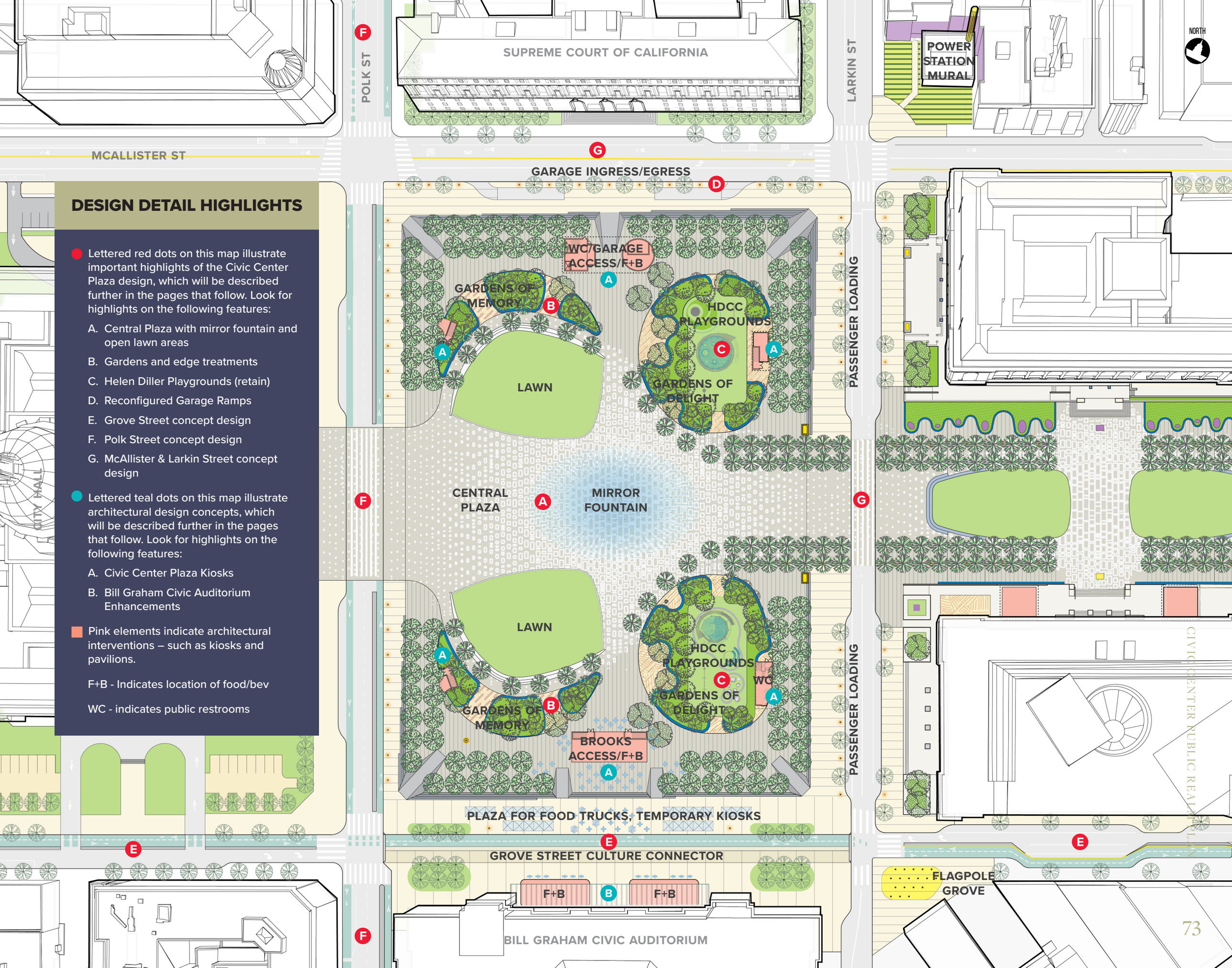
Today: The city's central space for civic demonstrations (image by Fabrice Florin, CC BY-SA 2.0)

DESIGN DETAIL HIGHLIGHTS

- Lettered red dots on this map illustrate important highlights of the Civic Center Plaza design, which will be described further in the pages that follow. Look for highlights on the following features:
  - A. Central Plaza with mirror fountain and open lawn areas
  - B. Gardens and edge treatments
  - C. Helen Diller Playgrounds (retain)
  - D. Reconfigured Garage Ramps
  - E. Grove Street concept design
  - F. Polk Street concept design
  - G. McAllister & Larkin Street concept design
- Lettered teal dots on this map illustrate architectural design concepts, which will be described further in the pages that follow. Look for highlights on the following features:
  - A. Civic Center Plaza Kiosks
  - B. Bill Graham Civic Auditorium Enhancements
- Pink elements indicate architectural interventions – such as kiosks and pavilions.

F+B - Indicates location of food/bev

WC - indicates public restrooms



A

CENTRAL PLAZA

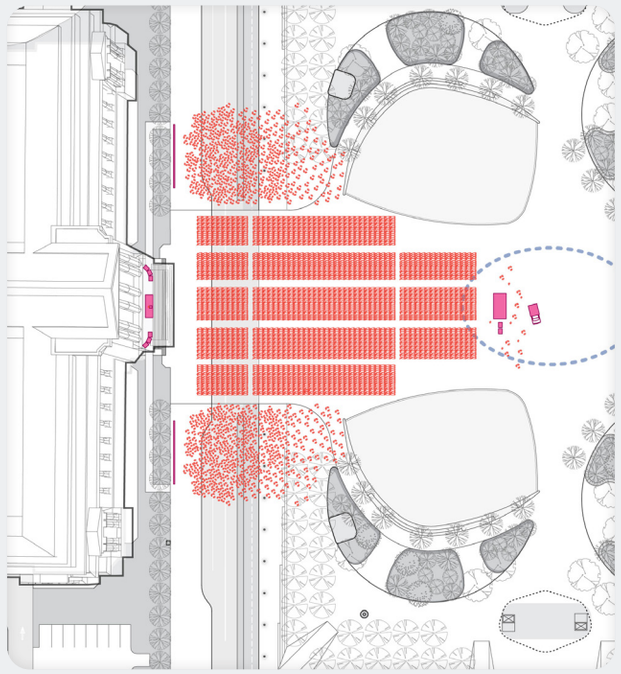
The design supports large and small public gatherings, celebrations, and demonstrations in a generous, flexible central gathering space at the heart of the Plaza. This space has clear sight lines to and from City Hall and adjacent streets, subtle grade change that provides prospect at its edges, and ample opportunities for temporary stage locations and other necessary event infrastructure and services.

The central gathering space also supports daily use, with plaza and multi-use lawn areas as well as a mirror fountain that honors the grandness of the space, reflecting the City Hall dome. A thin sheet of water with a mist feature, the mirror fountain can also be a playful multi-generational feature that functions with the lawns and playgrounds to create a family destination on a daily basis. The fountain can be turned off seasonally, and to expand usable plaza area during events.

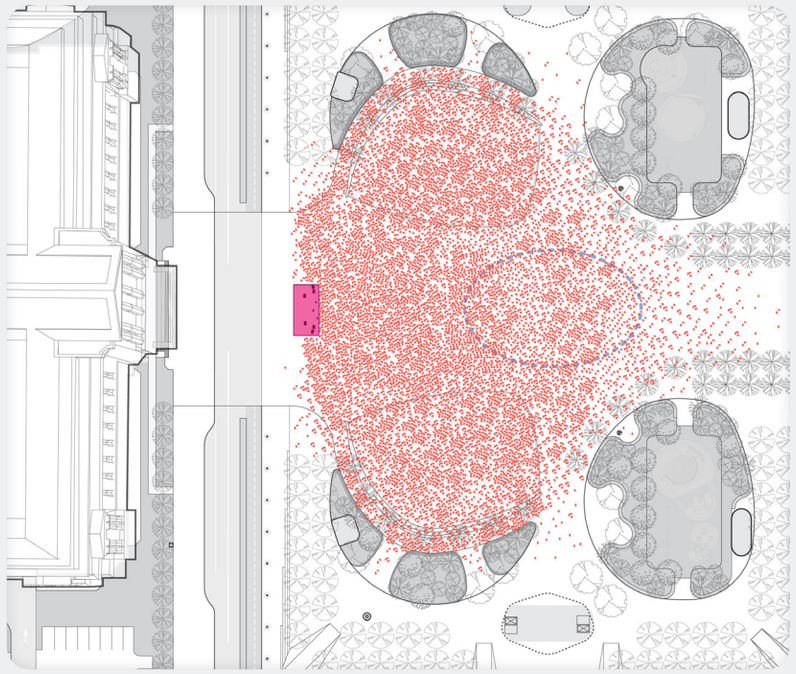


Can the design support large events and demonstrations?

This Public Realm Plan seeks to enhance Civic Center as a space for daily neighborhood use while also improving it as a ceremonial gathering place that inspires civic pride. The design creates intimate, human-scaled spaces that feel comfortable for a neighborhood resident visiting the plaza on their own, but also makes sure the space can support a growing number of major events and demonstrations both at, and beyond, existing capacities. Designs have been vetted to be sure they can support a large range of events, whether these events are planned or spontaneous, small or large. The diagram above shows two scenarios for event types that have been considered in creating the public space designs.



Inauguration on City Hall Steps: 5,200 people (seated/ standing)



Live Performance/Demonstration with Stage at Dr. Carlton B Goodlett Place: 14,100 people (standing)

B

GARDENS AND EDGE TREATMENTS

These spaces would be clustered around the edges of the plaza. The Gardens of Memory proposed on the Polk Street side of the plaza would create a quiet place of respite where historical figures or events can be memorialized. Planting areas within the gardens would be protected with benches and rails to be sure they can be well-maintained. Nearby, the pavilion at McAllister Street would provide bathrooms, water fountains, food, and garage access, uses that activate the street and plaza and serve visitors.



C

HELEN DILLER PLAYGROUNDS

The Plan preserves the existing Helen Diller Civic Center Playgrounds, surrounding them with human scale opportunities for access to nature, such as smaller garden areas. The adjacent Gardens of Delight would expand the presence of the playgrounds and bring beauty and seasonal character to Civic Center. Ample seating on playful contiguous benches also would help protect new planting areas around the existing Playgrounds.



D

RECONFIGURED GARAGE RAMPS

Currently, the north half of Civic Center Plaza is burdened by wide access ramps to the Civic Center Parking garage along McAllister and Larkin Streets, and a scattering of stairs and mechanical vents. The design calls for moving the ramps and consolidating the stairs and vents to use space more efficiently and open up more space for recreation and programming. The Plan calls for thinner ingress and egress ramps along McAllister Street that feed into a central drive aisle, the design of which has been vetted to be sure it meets demand and level of service requirements for the garage. The changed ramp configuration improves pedestrian safety and circulation around the edges of the plaza and also accommodates generous allees of trees, providing much desired access to nature and greenery. The proposed concepts will require CEQA and project approval, including consideration by the HPC and potential requirement of a Certificate of Appropriateness.



PROPOSED RAMP RELOCATION

Existing Ramp (to remove)

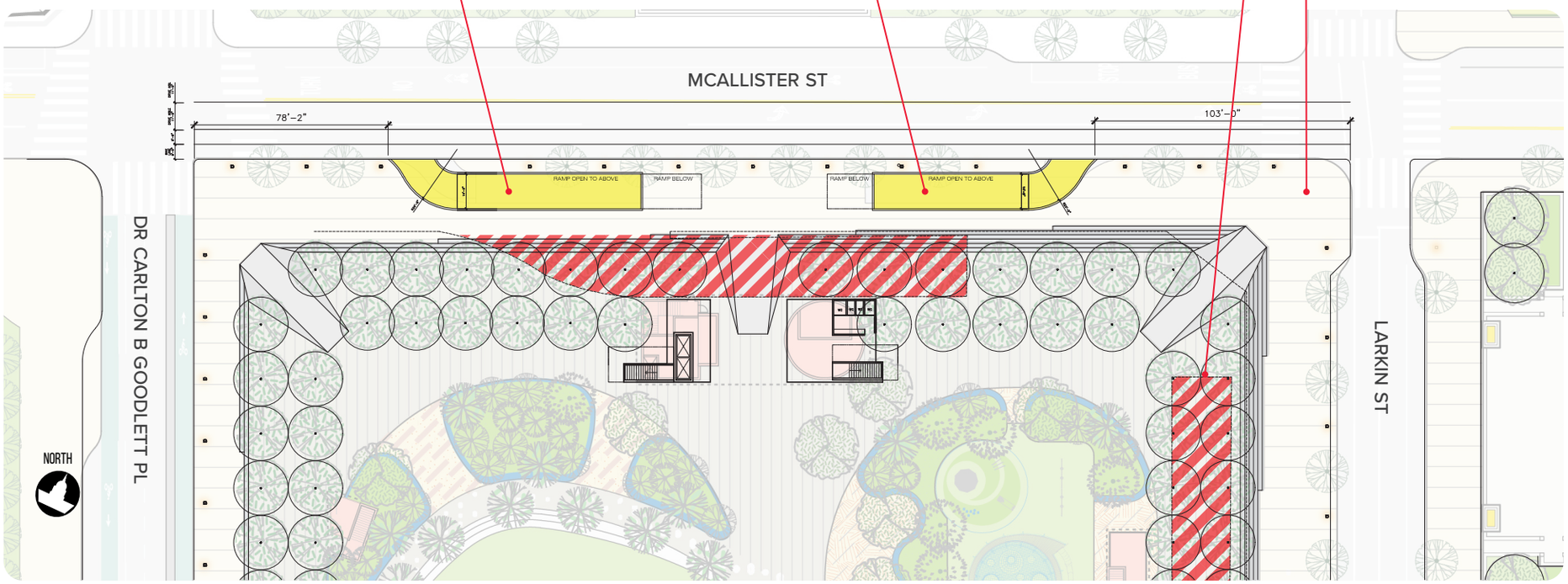
New Ramp

Locating new ramps on McAllister ensures easy access and least amount of plaza disruption

Ramp moved north from existing location to allow trees and pedestrian circulation along McAllister Street

Removing ramp allows connections across Larkin Street, and minimizes vehicle/pedestrian conflicts

Provides ample room at corners and mid block



War Memorial Gateway - A Gracious Entry & Flexible-use Plaza

Located at the western edge of the Fulton Street axis on the west side of City Hall, the existing Franklin-Fulton intersection poses a dangerous pedestrian crossing, provides substandard accessibility, and presents an unmemorable entry into the War Memorial Complex and Historic Civic Center District.

A flexible-use plaza concept would provide a gracious western entry into the War Memorial Complex and Historic Civic Center District by regrading and repaving the existing pathways and roadways to create a flexible-use plaza that forms a beautiful civic gateway between Hayes Valley and the War Memorial Complex. The Plaza accommodates vehicular access (parking and loading) as well as events and programming.

Durable, elegant, and smooth paving creates a flexible use plaza and cues vehicles to drive slowly through the space.

The design of the plaza can incorporate event infrastructure, such as tent footing foundations and power pedestals, into the plaza.

Moveable planters accommodate small trees or plantings, and can be placed on lockable casters. The planters can be moved to accommodate events, and would fit within a tented event, a cherished use that happens in this space today.

As part of this design, circulation of the site would be modified from existing to provide more efficient and safer general and accessible passenger loading as well as delivery and freight access to adjacent institutions.





1. Raised crosswalks improve pedestrian safety and calm traffic.
2. Parking relocated to restore view axis towards War Memorial and City Hall.
3. Regulate and preserve existing truck loading access and with removable bollards like existing ones on site
4. Durable, elegant, and smooth paving creates a flexible use plaza and cues vehicles to drive slowly
5. Planters accommodate small trees or focal point plants, and can be rearranged for tented events
6. Opportunity to repave horseshoe drive with improved materials

E

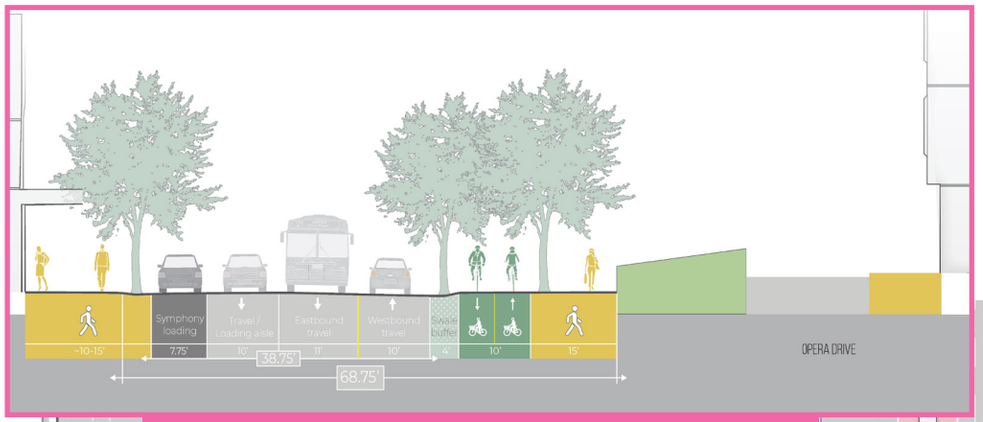
GROVE STREET

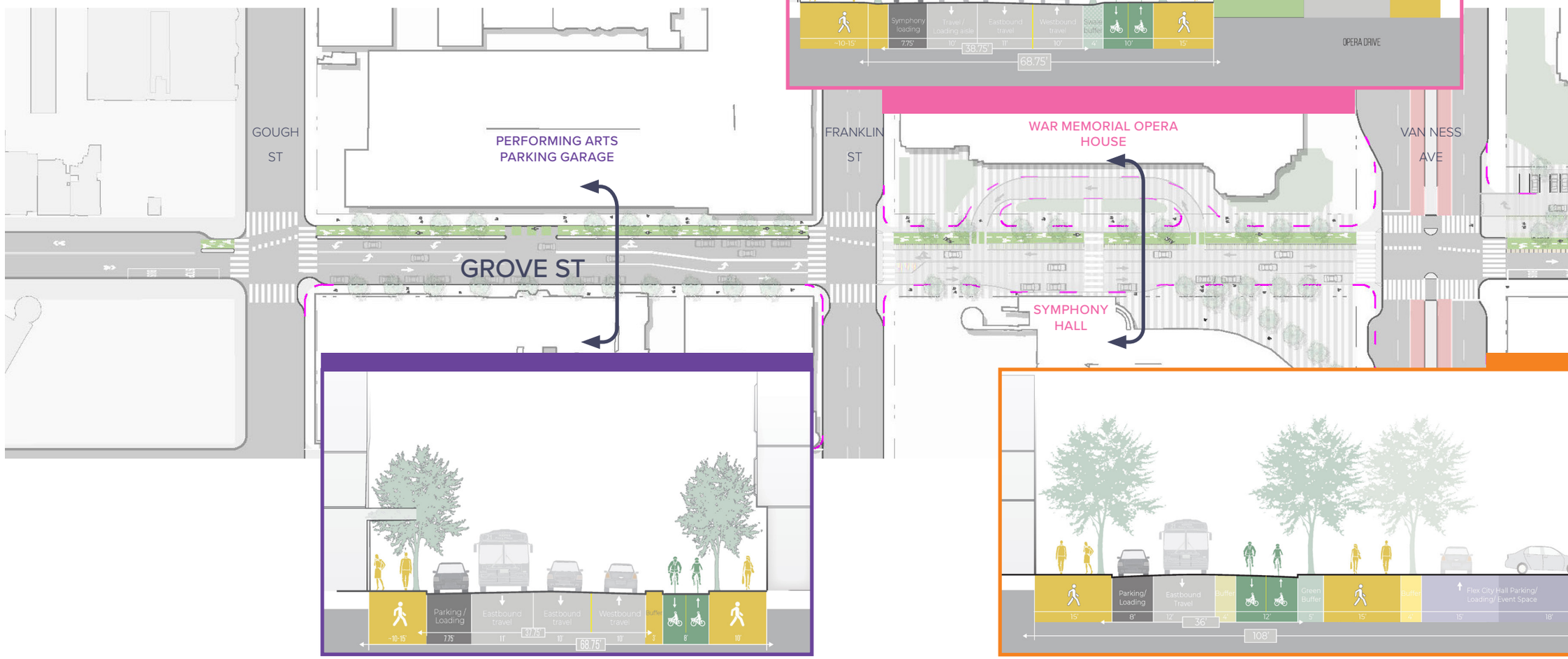
The Culture Connector

Linking many cultural institutions from Gough Street east to transit-rich Market Street, Grove street has the capacity to be transformed into a world-class multimodal street that incorporates and responds to the public realm improvements forwarded by this Plan. With little vehicle traffic, abundantly wide asphalt right-of-way, and close proximity to the cultural and arts institutions that front it, Grove Street can play a key role as the area's main Culture Connector.

While the following advances only one potential design concept, it is sensitive to the unique and differing character and needs of institutional stakeholders and buildings on each block. Full technical analysis and detailed design would be workshopped with City agencies and public stakeholders before arriving at a final design. This design concept for Grove Street sets a course toward remaking the street into a vibrant and active arts and culture connector.

The Plan's concept design propose changes that better balance the street in terms of prioritizing intersection safety and improving the pedestrian and bicycle experience. This is done through the narrowing and reduction of vehicle lanes and modifying circulation, access, and turn restrictions. With Grove Street prioritized for a bicycle facility upgrade, this Plan's concept design also plots a potential route for a new separated two-way bikeway the length of the corridor, creating a much-needed east west connection within San Francisco's bicycle network. Major sidewalk widening would prioritize the pedestrian and enhance the experience traversing Grove Street's length from the transit-rich Market Street to Gough Street.





DESIGN CONCEPT HIGHLIGHTS

- Pedestrian-priority upgrades on all blocks, with significant opportunity on Plaza block
- Narrowed and enhanced intersection crossings
- New furnishings, trees and planting areas

- Fully-separated two-way bikeway/multi-use trail

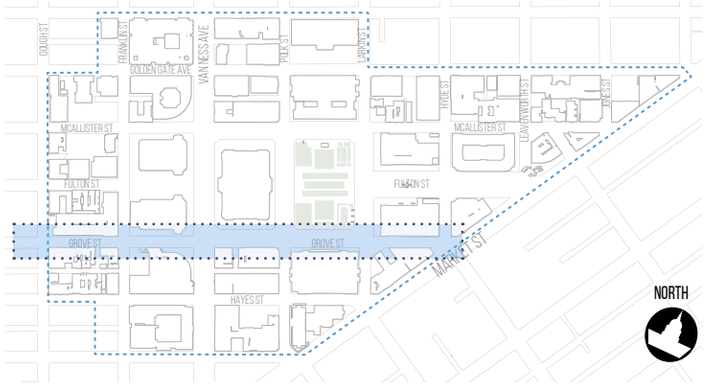
- No changes to Muni's 21-Hayes service

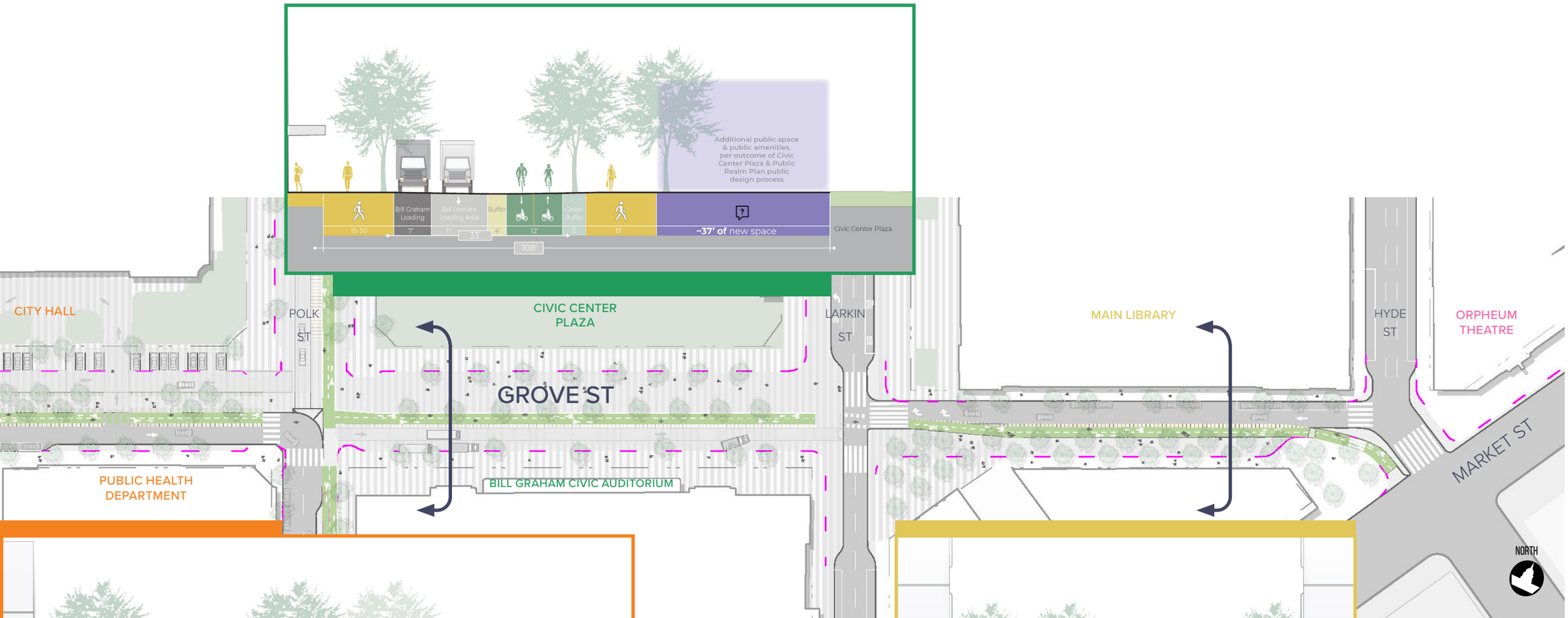
- 2 lanes between Gough & Polk
- 1 eastbound loading-only lane between Polk & Larkin
- 1 westbound lane between Larkin & Market
- Reduction in traffic volume

- No private vehicles on Plaza block (Bill Graham Civic Auditorium loading-only)
- 1 lane, one-way westbound between Larkin & Market (Library block) to improve safety at Market and Grove

- Parallel parking/loading on one side of street on all blocks

KEY MAP



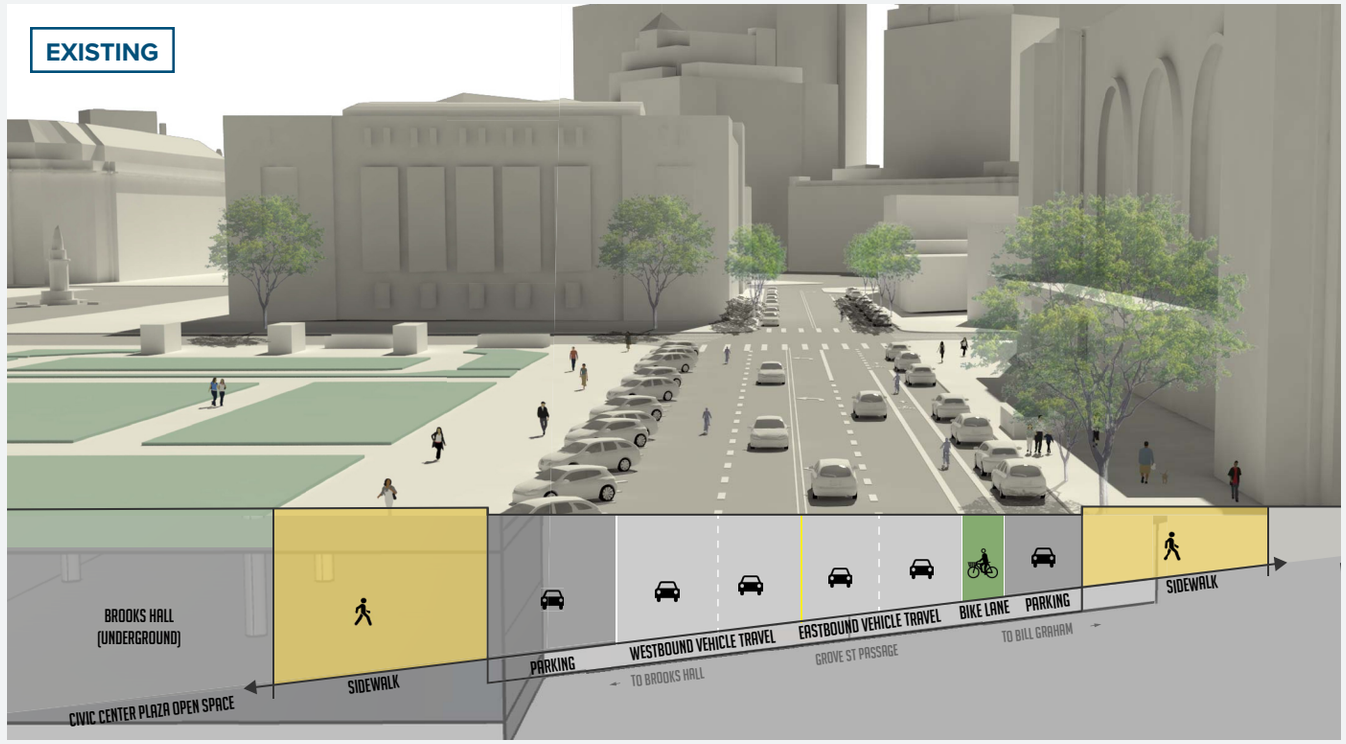


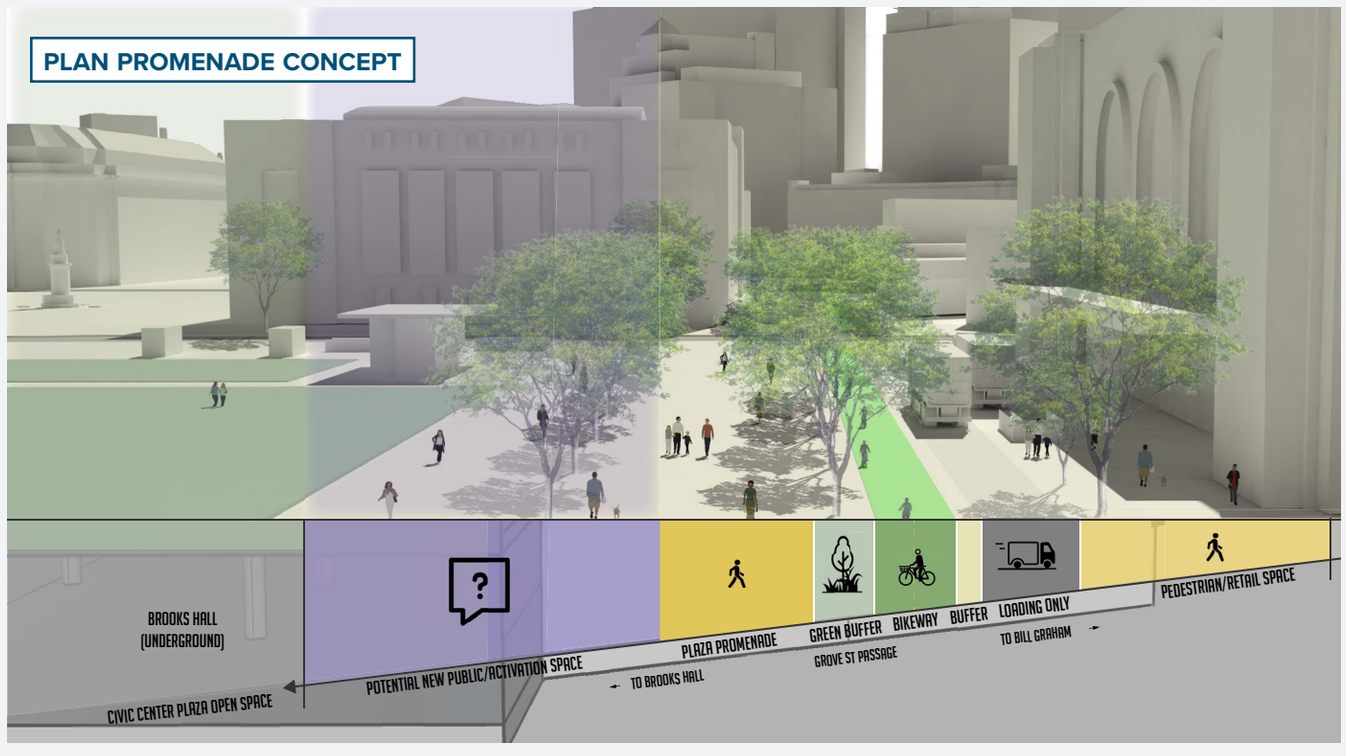




BLOCK HIGHLIGHT

Plaza Block - Polk to Larkin





Open Space Activation

Whether along Civic Center Plaza, City Hall, or smaller open spaces such as those fronting the Library and Symphony, public open spaces along Grove St are generally inactive today. As with building facades, these open spaces need to activate and be activated by the Grove Street edge, creating a dynamic activation synergy that animates open space and street.

Excess Street Space

2 of the 5 study blocks of Grove Street, the central City Hall and Plaza blocks, have excess roadway width, providing overcapacity for current and projected traffic volumes. The street creates safety concerns by being a barrier and not a connector. Rethinking how we reapportion this excess space is Grove Street's greatest opportunity.

Inactive Ground Floors

Many of Grove Street's key arts institutions have empty, blank, or inactive ground floor facades, contributing to an inactive Grove Street. This provides an opportunity to work toward creative solutions that enliven the ground floor of this Culture Connector.

Grove Street could function as a major new pedestrian plaza that would anchor the new Culture Corridor - but would need to be active, public, limit private vehicle access, and remain flexible for events and loading.

Plaza Activation

The new multi-purpose building on this Grove Street side of the Plaza will help activate the street and the Plaza, like the café kiosk that exists today

Loading and Event Access

Though not depicted here, a loading aisle for Bill Graham would allow for event loading on this key block, and the open design of the plaza makes it flexible for large events, something the public has grown to expect and enjoy on this block of Grove Street.

Bill Graham activation

Activating the ground-floor of Bill Graham with new retail spaces will breathe new life into the grand historic building, support auditorium patrons, and activate the new pedestrian plaza on this block of Grove St, the Culture Connector.

Grove Street Culture Connector

One concept for Grove Street between Larkin and Polk Streets is a pedestrian and bike-only promenade. This allows for flexible activation and accommodation of existing tented and performance events. This configuration would also allow for part time loading for Bill Graham Civic Auditorium shows. Because this block is so lightly used by vehicles, roadway space can be given back to users via activation, programming, and introduction of active ground floor uses that would support round-the-clock street life.





CONSIDERATIONS AND OUTSTANDING QUESTIONS

- Activation of this new space is key. These changes should be phased with adjacent activation on the Plaza and on the ground floor of Bill Graham Civic Auditorium.

- In order to open this flagship block of Grove Street as a landmark open space plaza, connecting Bill Graham to Civic Center Plaza, access to private vehicles would be restricted. Eastbound vehicles (and the 21-Hayes bus) on Grove Street approaching Polk Street would be allowed to turn right only onto Polk; westbound vehicles on Grove approaching Larkin Street would be allowed to turn right only onto Larkin.

- Accommodating Bill Graham Civic Auditorium's need for a Grove Street event space means the new plaza space must be kept free of permanent design elements. This restricts implementing permanent kiosks, seating, lighting, and trees. However, temporary and movable seating, lighting, and activation elements can be used and will be crucial to the success of the plaza, as will continued stakeholder engagement.

- Grove Street will remain key for Bill Graham Civic Auditorium's event loading needs. A loading aisle and parking lane would be designed on the Plaza. Locating the 10' aisle next to the 12' bikeway, with a 4' textured paving buffer, provides a full 26' clear emergency access lane.

F

POLK STREET

The Civic Front Door

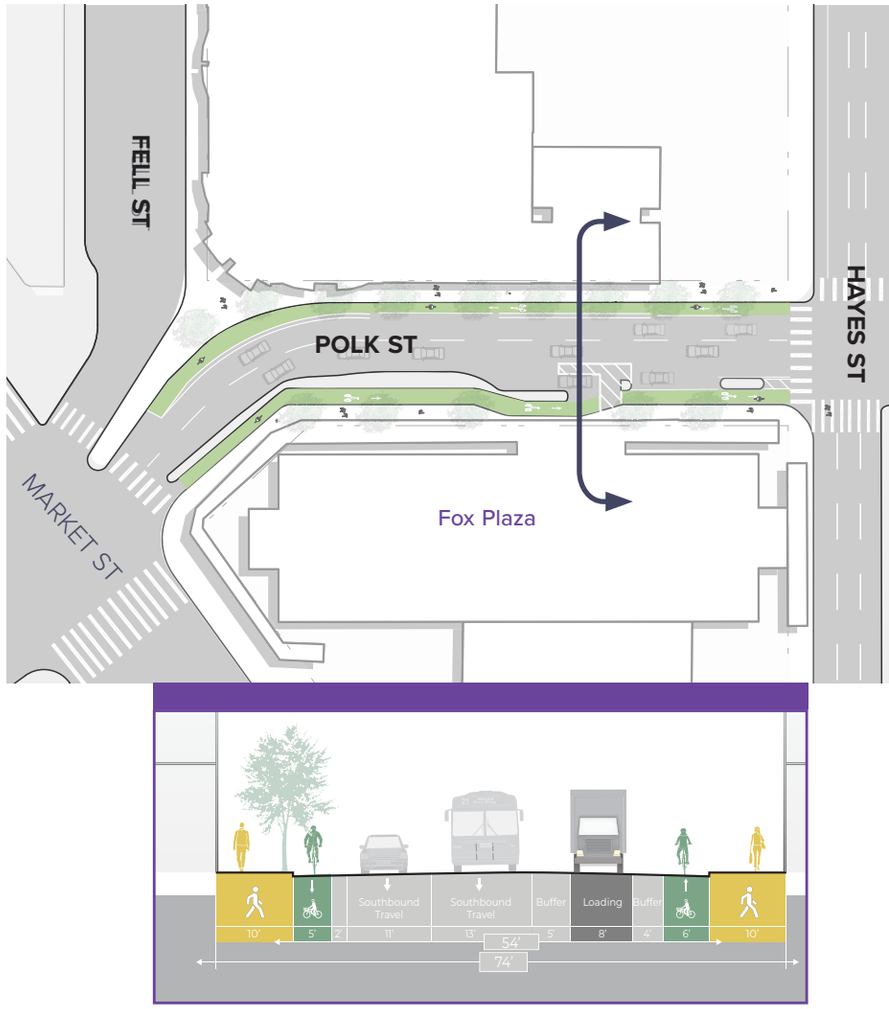
As the street that serves at City Hall's front door, Polk Street, or Dr. Carlton B Goodlett Place, as it is known between McAllister and Grove Streets, has a symbolic importance like few other city streets. Serving as venue for generations of inaugurations, protests, speeches, and rallies overflowing from the steps of City Hall, Polk Street is greatly important to San Francisco and City Hall's role as a democratic public institution. The design of Polk Street fronting City Hall reflects the city and the vision of San Francisco as a safe, active, pedestrian-oriented, civic and democratic city.

In 2018 the Polk Streetscape Plan implemented bicycle facility improvements north of McAllister Street. Extending improvements to Market Street in line with recent SFMTA quick-build efforts would complete these improvements. Continuing the separated one-way bikeways south to Market Street is a key goal of this design concept that would facilitate connection to San Francisco's Market Street spine and bikeway. Implementing bikeways would result in reconfigured parking curbside that currently separates City Hall from Civic Center Plaza. Removing the single northbound travel lane will also simplify circulation and create more space for park expansion, gathering, and people walking and biking - a front door that truly showcases the City's commitment to active and safe places for all, sustainable transportation, and vibrant public life. What is showcased here is only one potential design concept for Polk Street. Any advancement of this design would require additional technical study, interagency workshopping, stakeholder engagement, environmental review (as applicable), and consideration of project approval.









DESIGN CONCEPT HIGHLIGHTS

- Narrowed intersection crossings
- Raised intersection crossing at Fulton central axis
- Special paving, upgraded sidewalk furnishings, new trees and planting areas

- Parking-protected one-way bike lanes

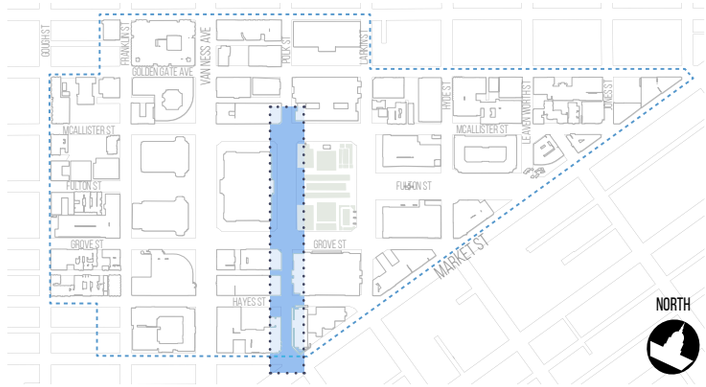
- No changes proposed to existing transit service

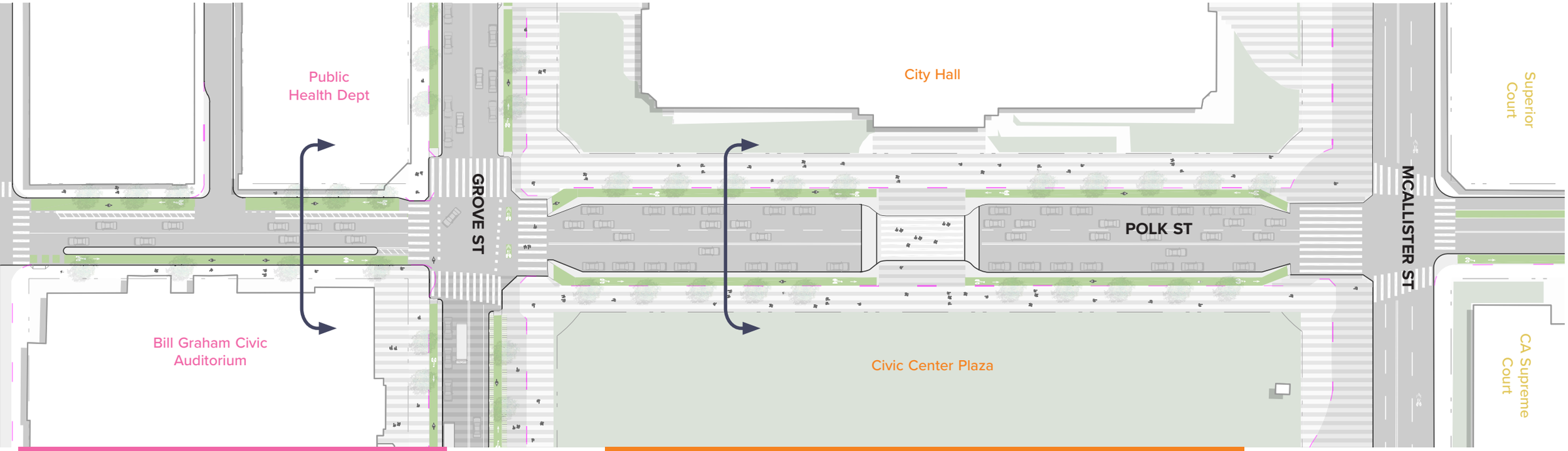
- 2 southbound lanes + 1 northbound lane north of Grove, 2 southbound lanes south of Grove
- Moderate traffic volumes

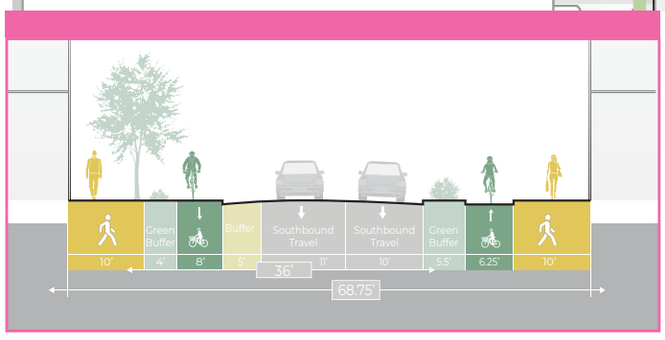
- No access or circulation changes proposed

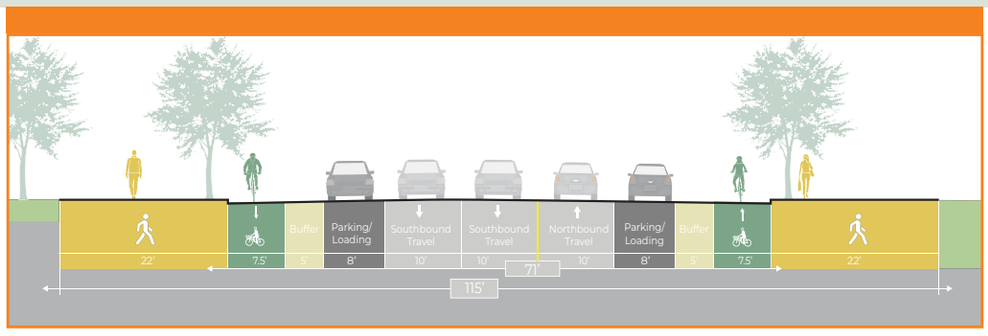
- Parallel parking/loading on both sides of street on City Hall/Plaza block
- Parallel parking/loading on one side of block between Hayes and Grove
- Loading only between Hayes and Market

KEY MAP



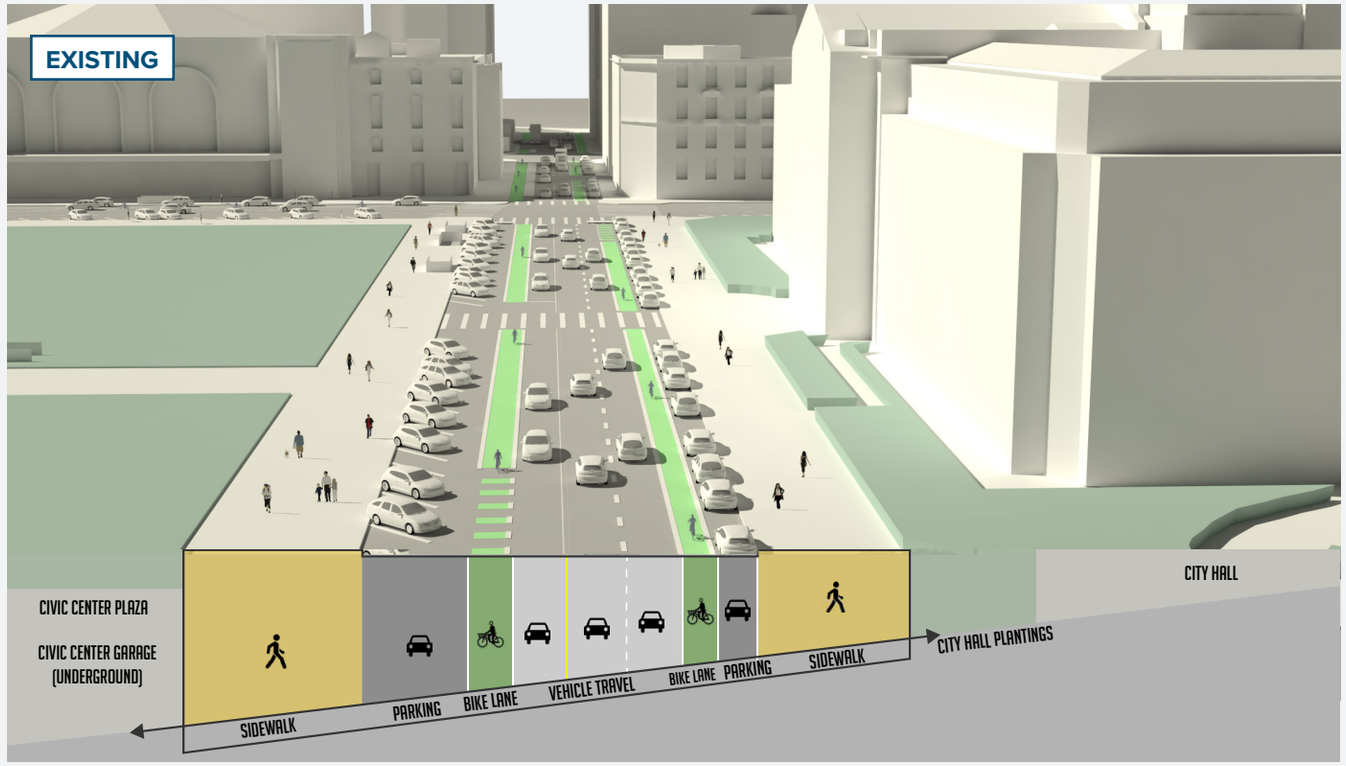


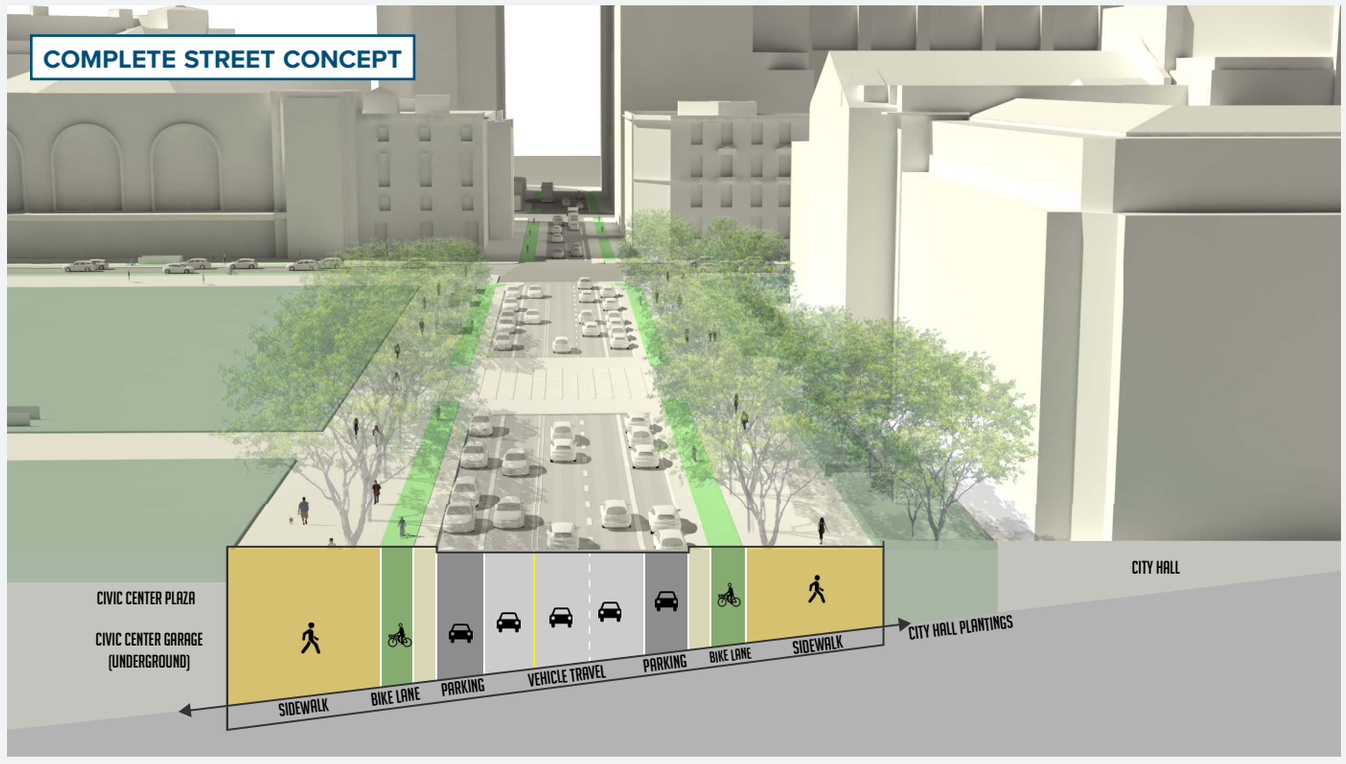




BLOCK HIGHLIGHT

City Hall Block - McAllister to Grove





PLAZA ACTIVATION

Civic Center Plaza should respond to and activate Polk Street (Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place), and vice versa. There is great opportunity for bridging the gap to better connect City Hall and Civic Center Plaza.

SIGNIFICANT SPACE FOR PARKING

Much of the on-street parking on this block is reserved for special permit holders. With angled parking adjacent to the Plaza on one side and parallel against City Hall, there is the opportunity for reconfiguring this space for uses that prioritize public life.

HISTORIC GROUND FLOORS

From City Hall to Bill Graham Civic Auditorium to the Public Health Building, many of the grand Beaux Arts buildings lining Polk Street have ground floors that are relatively blank and contain inactive uses. There are opportunities to rethink how these buildings function at the ground floor and how they can better serve the area and enliven the street.

Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place (Polk Street) can offer a safe and dignified entry to City Hall and Civic Center Plaza.

POLK BIKEWAY

Extending the northern Polk Street bikeway improvements southward would facilitate safe bicycle connections to and from Market Street. The SFMTA has already begun implementing a design similar to this Plan's concept, including protected one-way bikeways and parallel parking, filling a gap in the City's bike network.

LOADING AND PARKING

Loading and parking could be provided on both sides of this block in a reconfigured layout that allows for a better balanced street that prioritizes safety and pedestrian enjoyment.

BETTER CONNECTIONS

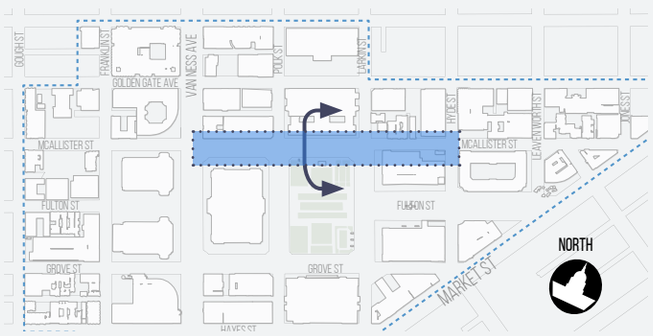
City Hall's front door hosts everything from inaugurations, protests and wedding photos. The Complete Street Concept could provide safer crossings across Polk Street, enabling a more gracious and grand entry into City Hall.

G

OTHER KEY PLAZA STREETS

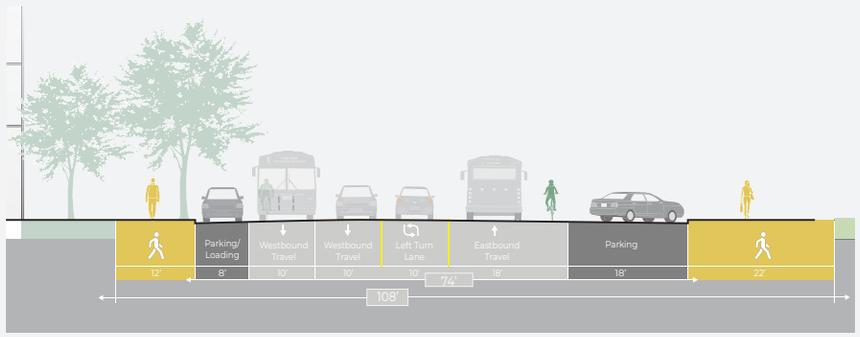
McAllister and Larking Streets both border some of Civic Center's key public spaces, including the Plaza. Both are widened significantly around the Plaza and also, for McAllister, at City Hall. While changes are not proposed on a corridor-wide level for either of these streets, changes are proposed for the blocks around the Civic Center Plaza and vicinity, as detailed on this page. The main goals are to provide pedestrian and safety upgrades that promote safe circulation in the district while also improving one's experience on these streets.

McAllister Street

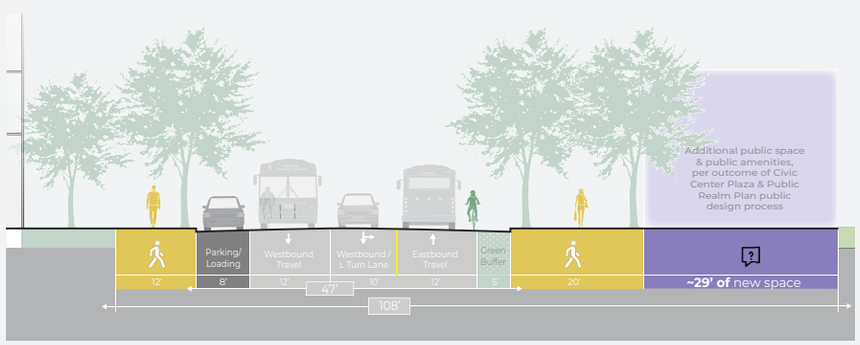


DESIGN CONCEPT HIGHLIGHTS

- Strengthened role as major transit corridor (5-Fulton and 5R Rapid), with transit-priority upgrades
- 29' of potential reclaimed public space created from wide, 108' existing right-of-way
- Gracious pedestrian promenade along Civic Center Plaza's north edge
- Narrowed intersection crossings and enhanced crossing treatments for safety

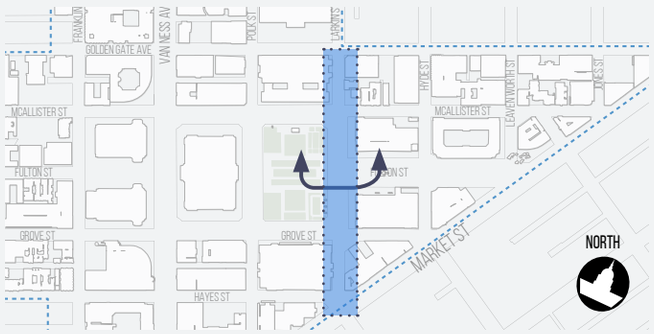


MCALLISTER ST, EXISTING, POLK TO LARKIN, LOOKING EAST



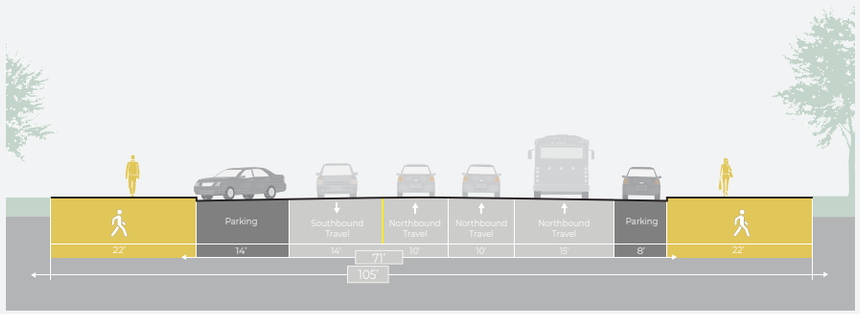
MCALLISTER ST, PROPOSED, POLK TO LARKIN, LOOKING EAST

Larkin Street

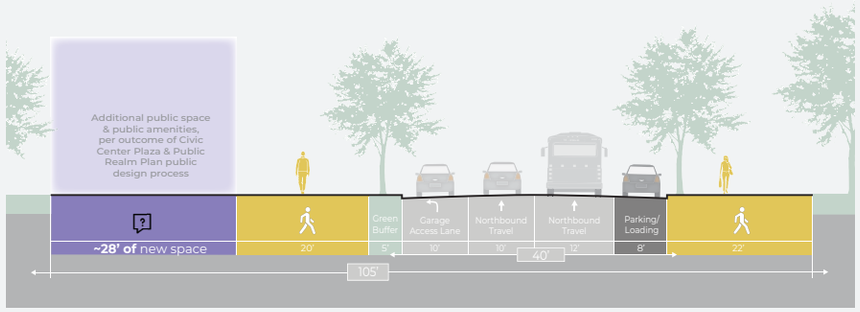


DESIGN CONCEPT HIGHLIGHTS

- Strengthened role as major neighborhood gateway street
- 28' of potential reclaimed public space created from wide, 105' existing right-of-way
- Gracious pedestrian promenades along Civic Center Plaza's east edge and fronting the Public Library and Asian Art Museum
- Narrowed intersection crossings and enhanced crossing treatments for safety



LARKIN ST, EXISTING, GROVE TO MCALLISTER, LOOKING NORTH



LARKIN ST, PROPOSED, GROVE TO MCALLISTER, LOOKING NORTH

CASE STUDY A

Civic Center Plaza Kiosks

Re-imagined entrances could provide new amenities while preserving views across the plaza

ACTIVATED ENTRANCES

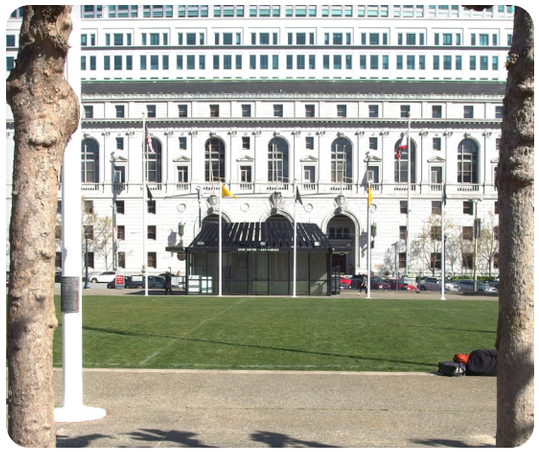
Civic Center Plaza is the roof of both the Civic Center Parking Garage and Brooks Hall, and both of these underground structures have openings into Civic Center plaza.

The Civic Center Parking Garage currently features an elevator enclosure above ground on the McAllister Street side of Civic Center Plaza. While the enclosure provides protection from the elements, it offers few other amenities. The rendering on this page provides an example of how this entrance could offer much more to people using the plaza, such as new elevators, public bathrooms, water fountains, and a small café, in addition to fire exit stairs. These new uses could be arranged in two structures to frame the north south visual axis between the Civic Auditorium and the Courthouse, so anyone standing on the plaza could still take in the historic buildings at the edges.

Brooks Hall does not feature active uses below ground currently, but as described on pages 64-65, it could in the future. No matter what future uses move forward for this large underground space, entrances to the plaza will be needed. Today, entrances take the shape of utilitarian stairwells, often boarded or gated off for safety. The rendering on the following pages imagines a scenario where entrances to Brooks Hall are hubs of activity. Smaller exit areas could feature egress stairs and public restrooms. A main entrance closer to Grove Street could include a retail or commercial space (like the Café Kiosk on site today) with stairs and elevators.

These interventions would require below-grade modifications including a new system of additional support beams and consolidation access points and ventilation infrastructure.





The Civic Center Parking Garage currently features an elevator enclosure above ground on the McAllister side of Civic Center Plaza. While the enclosure provides protection from the elements, it offers few other amenities.



The rendering above provides an example of how the Civic Center Parking Garage entrance on the McAllister side of the plaza could offer much more, such new elevators, public bathrooms, water fountains, and a small café.





Today, entrances to Brooks Hall on the Grove Street side of the plaza take the shape utilitarian stairwells, often boarded or gated off for safety. The renderings above imagines a scenario where entrances to Brooks Hall are hubs of activity. Smaller exit areas could feature egress stairs and public restrooms. A main entrance closer to Grove Street could include a retail or commercial space (like the Café Kiosk on site today) with stairs and elevators.



NEAR TERM INVESTMENTS

LESSONS LEARNED

Small Interventions, Big Impact

As part of the renovation of the Helen Diller Civic Center Playgrounds, a café kiosk was constructed at the corner of Grove and Larkin Streets. The café offers coffee, drinks and light fare, serving families visiting the playgrounds as well as those who work in or are visiting the Civic Center area. Public life data collected before the COVID-19 pandemic indicated that this small-scale food and beverage amenity had a significant impact on the plaza. With the opening of the kiosk, the plaza saw an increase in pedestrian activity and a change in patterns – rather than just hurrying through, people were lingering to visit with friends and colleagues and enjoy time in public space with picturesque City Hall as a backdrop. Importantly, there is also a clean and staffed public restroom immediately adjacent to the kiosk, operated through the Pit Stop Program, which provides jobs to people with barriers to employment. While the café has changed hands post pandemic, the synergy between these two amenities provides an important case study about the role that small scale architectural interventions can play in the public realm.

CASE STUDY B

Bill Graham Civic Auditorium Enhancements

Targeted interventions could help activate the ground floor of this iconic but monolithic building

A VENUE THAT CONTRIBUTES TO PUBLIC LIFE

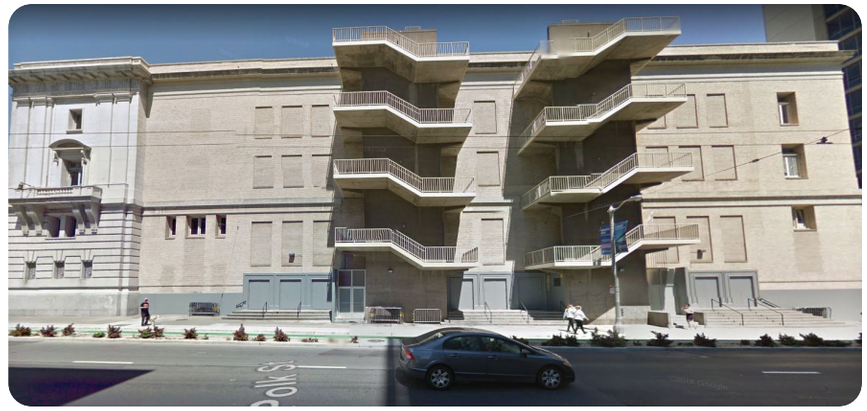
Bill Graham Civic Auditorium (BGCA) is a City-owned multi-purpose building that opened in 1915 as part of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. The auditorium has hosted the Democratic National Convention, was the home of the Golden State Warriors basketball team, and has hosted many music concerts. Since 2010, the City has leased the auditorium to Another Planet Entertainment (APE) who currently operate it as a concert and event venue.

BGCA occupies the entire city block bounded by Grove, Larkin, Polk, and Hayes streets, but only the Grove Street frontage has public entries and a detailed Beaux-Arts facade. The other three frontages are utilitarian in appearance and function. During events, crowds on their way to or from the auditorium help enliven and activate the surrounding sidewalks and public spaces. But on the many days when no events are taking place, the facility has a deadening effect on its surroundings.

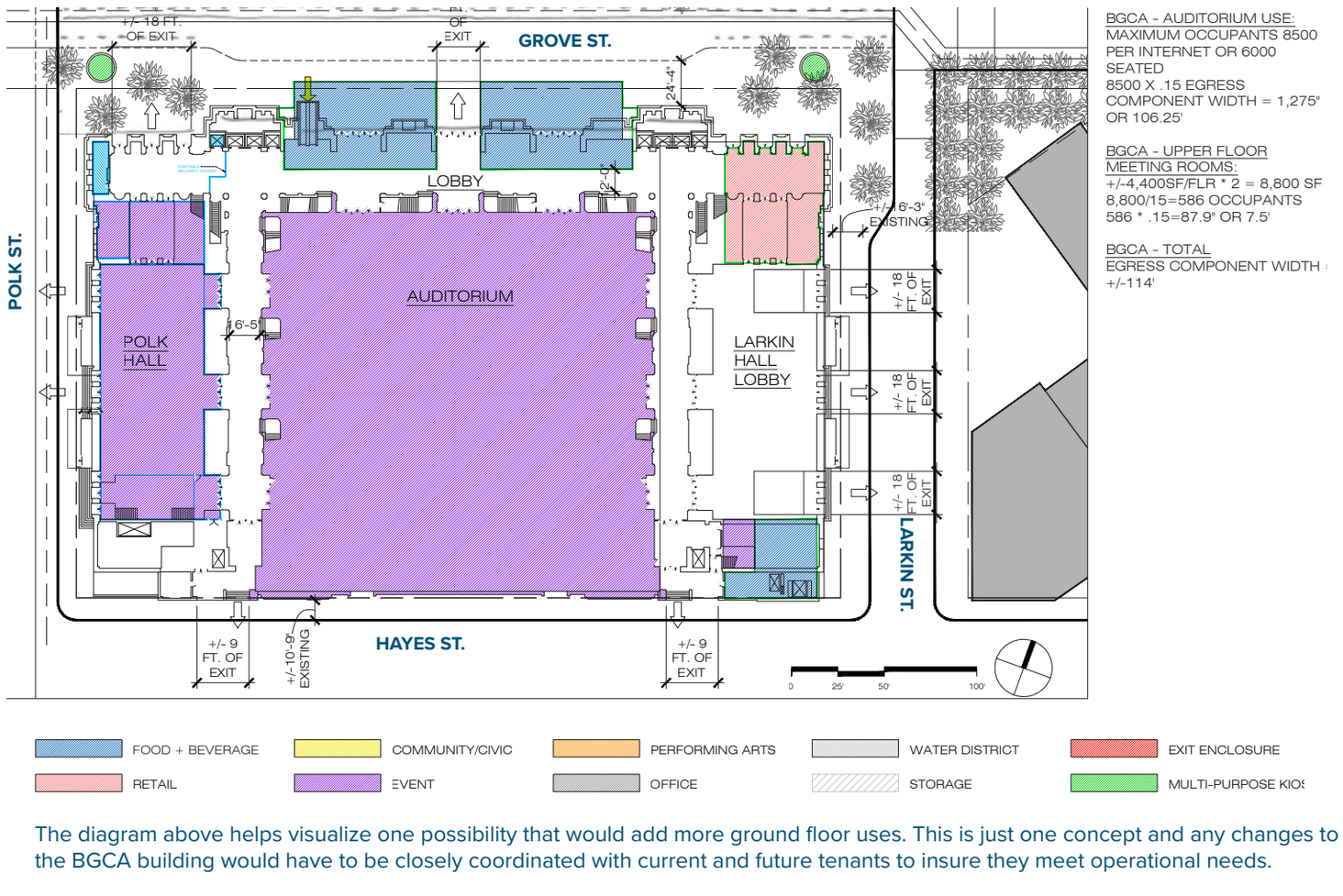
Targeted interventions could help activate the ground floor of the building – particularly along Grove Street – and enhance public life and safety on the south side of the plaza. The diagram at right and the rendering on the facing page helps visualize one possibility that would add more ground floor uses without damaging the building's historic integrity. In this scenario, the primary lobby and egress for the building would be moved to Larkin Hall, with secondary access off Grove Street between two new retail pavilions sheltered by a re-imagined marquee. This concept would add new retail space at Grove, Larkin and Hayes.

An intervention like this would require adjusting multiple aspects of the interior of the building including exit configuration and lobby circulation, and would require thorough vetting by current and/or future building tenants. The proposals would require environmental review, and review and approval by the HPC. As a result of the process, the designs could change.





Only the Grove Street frontage of Bill Graham Civic Auditorium has public entries and a detailed Beaux Arts facade. The other three frontages are inactive, and on the many days when no events are taking place, the facility's blank facades have a deadening effect on their surroundings.



The diagram above helps visualize one possibility that would add more ground floor uses. This is just one concept and any changes to the BGCA building would have to be closely coordinated with current and future tenants to insure they meet operational needs.





The renderings above help visualize one possibility for adding more ground floor uses to the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium. In this scenario, the entrance at Grove Street is enhanced with two new retail pavilions sheltered by a re-interpreted marquee. Inspired by the materials used in the pre-1963 historic marquee structure, this concept offers a more transparent, welcoming, and visually interesting entrance. In this design, the glass would have the effect of refracting light by day and brightening the sidewalk as light pours out of the building during nighttime events. An intervention like this would require adjusting multiple aspects of the interior of the building including exit configuration and lobby circulation, and would require thorough vetting by current and/or future building tenants.



Honoring the Historic Marquee

The marquee we see at the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium today is not original and inconsistent with the design of the of the building. It was put in place in 1963, replacing the original 1915 structure shown in the image above.

The renderings in this section show a potential re-interpretation of the marquee that draws inspiration from the original that was removed. The concept here is inspired by the original materials used in the historic structure – glass, iron, and copper. The new concept uses glass panels hung from exposed trusses, offering a more transparent, welcoming, and visually interesting entrance. In this design, the glass would have the effect of refracting light by day and brightening the sidewalk as light pours out of the building during nighttime events. The new marquee would be visually integrated with the proposed retail extensions along Grove, weaving these renovations together through similar materials, and providing a sheltered space for people gathering on the sidewalk. These renderings show just one potential design direction, but it illustrates the important role that a visually integrated, activated, and transparent Grove Street marquee could play in activating the public realm and honoring the building's history.



CHAPTER 5
FULTON STREET MALL

Site-Specific Proposals: Fulton Street Mall

APPROACH + CONSIDERATIONS

Fulton Street Mall has great potential to be transformed into a public open space. This block connects Civic Center Plaza to UN Plaza and is adjacent to two important community and cultural institutions - the San Francisco Public Library (“Main Library”) and the Asian Art Museum. These institutions are stewards and advocates for improving Civic Center’s public realm, providing important community resources and social services, curating and programming temporary outdoor installations, and supporting ongoing activation of the public realm through the Civic Center Initiative.

The Plan builds on their commitment by closing this block of Fulton Street to traffic and re-imagining it as the cultural heart of Civic Center’s public realm. The Plan encourages the life inside the Main Library and the Asian Art Museum to spill outside with new access and uses along their terraces, and it creates new multi-use areas between the two buildings to accommodate recreational and cultural programming while maintaining flexibility for large events. This approach is aligned with existing policy in the City’s General Plan, which calls for converting this block of Fulton into a public open space.

Currently a public street, Fulton is typically dedicated to parking spaces, tour bus loading, and the Pioneer Monument. Activation efforts have illustrated how Fulton can be transformed into usable space through recurring community events and seasonal recreational uses, such as Street Soccer, block parties, and the Heart of the City Farmers’ Market. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Fulton served a critical role in the City’s disaster response as a Safe Sleeping Village for vulnerable, unhoused residents.

The concept design shows potential relocation of the Pioneer Monument elsewhere. A decision has not been made whether to relocate the Monument, and if so, where to relocate it to. No such decision will be made prior to full analysis of this scenario through a public review process, including compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and review by the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC).



FULTON STREET LOOKING EAST C. 1915



(Image by CCCBD)



LARKIN ST

PASSENGER LOADING

ASIAN ART MUSEUM

TERRACE

SCULPTURE GARDEN

I

F+B

RAISED INTERSECTION

FLEXIBLE / MULTI-USE LAWN

H

FLEXIBLE PLAZA

FLEXIBLE / MULTI-USE LAWN

RAISED INTERSECTION

DESIGN DETAIL HIGHLIGHTS

- Lettered red dots on this map illustrate important highlights of the Fulton Street Mall design, which will be described further in the pages that follow. Look for highlights on the following features:
  - H. Flexible plaza and multi-use lawn areas
  - I. Activated building edges at the Asian Art Museum and SF Public Library Main Branch
- Lettered teal dots on this map illustrate architectural design concepts, which will be described further in the pages that follow. Look for highlights on the following features:
  - C. Library Entrance Pavilions
- Pink elements indicate architectural interventions – such as kiosks and pavilions.

F+B - Indicates location of food/bev

WC - indicates public restrooms

C

READING ROOM

F+B

C

TERRACE

I

WC / OFFICE

SF PUBLIC LIBRARY

PASSENGER LOADING

HYDE ST

CIVIC CENTER PUBLIC REALM PLAN

NORTH

H

FLEXIBLE PLAZA AND MULTI-USE LAWN AREAS

Gracious multi-use lawns combined with an open, flexible plaza connecting the Library and the Asian Art Museum transform the street to a vibrant, inviting park setting day and night. The Concept Plan for Fulton Street Mall would create a welcoming, sheltered space for programming and events, such as youth soccer or movie nights, between the Asian Art Museum and the Library.

The Library, Asian Art Museum and other City agencies are working closely with community partners to bring more recreational and programming activities to Fulton Street through temporary projects. A few examples, pictured below, include:

- A temporary seasonal recreation project which brought pop-up street soccer to Fulton Street, partially closing the street to vehicle traffic during the summer;
- An interactive sculpture and mural wall at the corner of Fulton and Larkin Street. Known as the Village Artist Corner, the project creates a platform for events and rotating public art curated by the Asian Art Museum;
- A series of monthly Sunday block parties that brought artisan vendors and recreational activities to Fulton Street, building off the energy of the Sunday Heart of the City Farmers' Market in nearby UN Plaza.
- Temporary relocation of the Heart of the City Farmers' Market









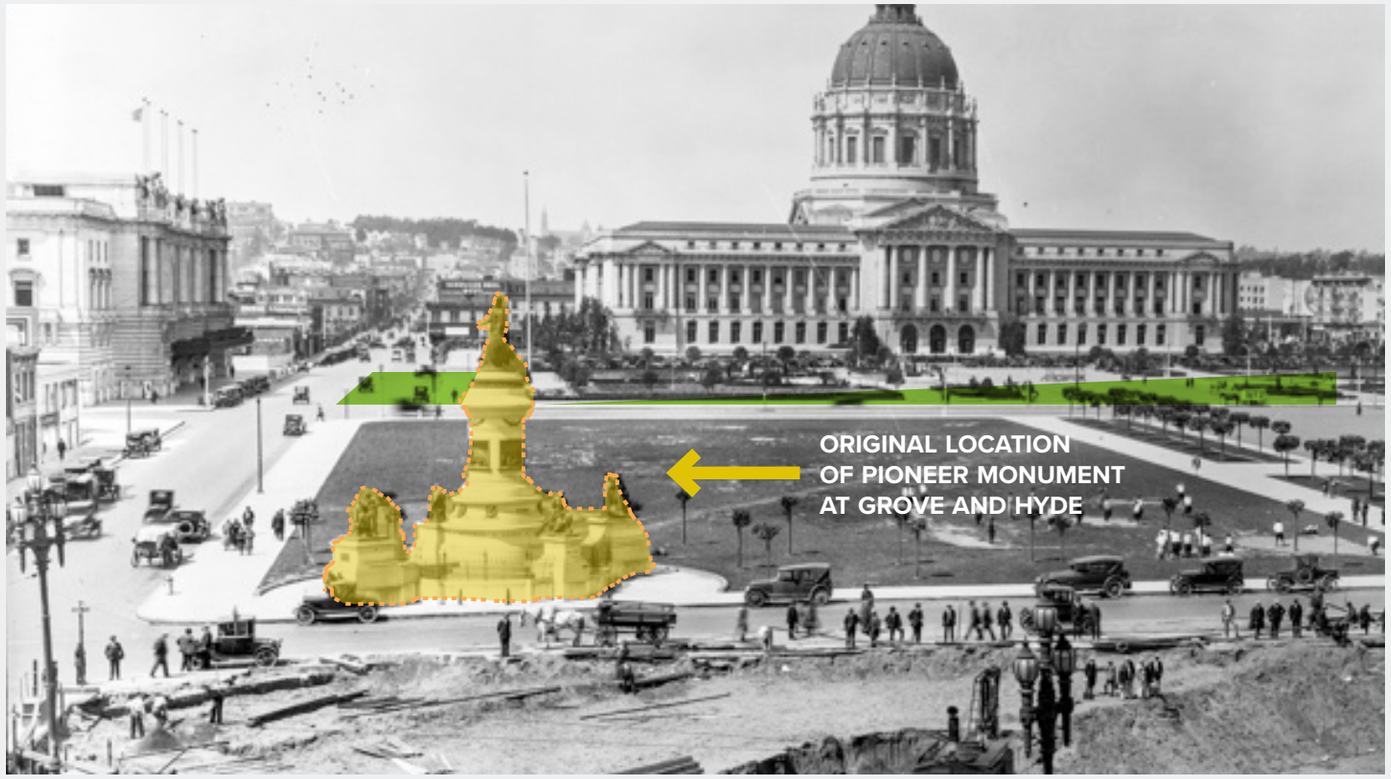
What about the Pioneer Monument?

The Pioneer Monument, a controversial historic resource dating back to 1896, was originally located at the old City Hall at the terminus of 8th Street in Marshall Square, within the future Main Library parcel. The monument was moved to its current location in the middle of Fulton Street in 1993 when the new Main Library was constructed. This location is problematic for a number of reasons:

- It undermines the intent of the Beaux-Arts Plan to maintain a continuous, open, flexible civic promenade from City Hall to Market Street; and
- It severely restricts the role that the Fulton Street Mall can play in bringing new amenities and recreational space to Civic Center.

In 2018, the San Francisco Arts Commission voted unanimously to remove “Early Days,” a statue on the fourth plinth of the monument, which depicted the subjugation of a Native American man at the hands of a Spanish cowboy and a Catholic missionary.

The Plan investigated potential sites for relocating the Pioneer Monument within the Landmark District to restore the intent of the Beaux-Arts Plan for the civic promenade, and to create a clear, flexible plaza connecting the Asian Art Museum and Main Library. There may also be opportunities to reinterpret the monument given the offensive nature of the Early Days statue. While this concept design is based on potential relocation of the monument, a decision has not been made whether to relocate it, and if so, where to relocate it to. No such decision will be made prior to full analysis of the Plan through a public review process, including compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and review by the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). At the end of that process, the City may decide to keep the Pioneer Monument in its current location or to move it to another location within the district.







BOTTOM LEFT: Pioneer Monument Today. Photo by Wally Gobetz.
BOTTOM RIGHT: Pioneer Monument as part of SFAC Continuous Thread art project, which engaged Indigenous communities in an effort to purify and reclaim the 4th plinth of the monument following removal of the Early Days sculpture. Photo by SFAC.

1

ACTIVATED BUILDING EDGES

The Fulton Street Mall-facing entrances to the Library and Asian Art Museum could be made accessible and the porches made active with new pavilions and services, an outdoor reading room, a new sculpture garden, and ample seating, enabling these important institutions to spill out and activate the public realm.

Importantly, the Plan aims to support activation at these building edges throughout the day, from morning coffees on the library terrace in the morning, to movie nights in the flexible central lawn at night.





An important part of the City's disaster response

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Fulton Mall played an important role in the City's disaster response. While the City was able to connect many people experiencing homelessness with places to stay in re-purposed hotel rooms and other indoor locations, safe sleeping sites emerged as another critical lifeline for vulnerable residents seeking a reliable place to sleep, store belongings, and access services at a safe distance from others.

In May of 2020, Fulton Mall opened as the city's first sanctioned camping site: tents were spaced apart for social distancing, and key services such as portable toilets and hand-washing stations were provided. The sites were staffed by trained ambassadors, who monitored conditions and helped address issues as they arose. Based on the Fulton Street model, additional safe sleeping sites were opened in other areas of the city.

This use of Fulton Street Mall during a disaster illustrates the importance of flexibility in design - this area at the footsteps of City Hall must be able to support a variety of uses, from shelters in a disaster, to civic demonstrations, to public art, programming and markets in better times. For example, Fulton Mall currently hosts the Heart of the City Farmers' Market twice weekly and the proposals in this Plan aim to maintain maximum flexibility for whatever the future may bring.



Image: Corey Browning - SF Examiner

CASE STUDY C

San Francisco Public Library Entrance Pavilions

Activated building edges would bring new services and amenities to Fulton Street

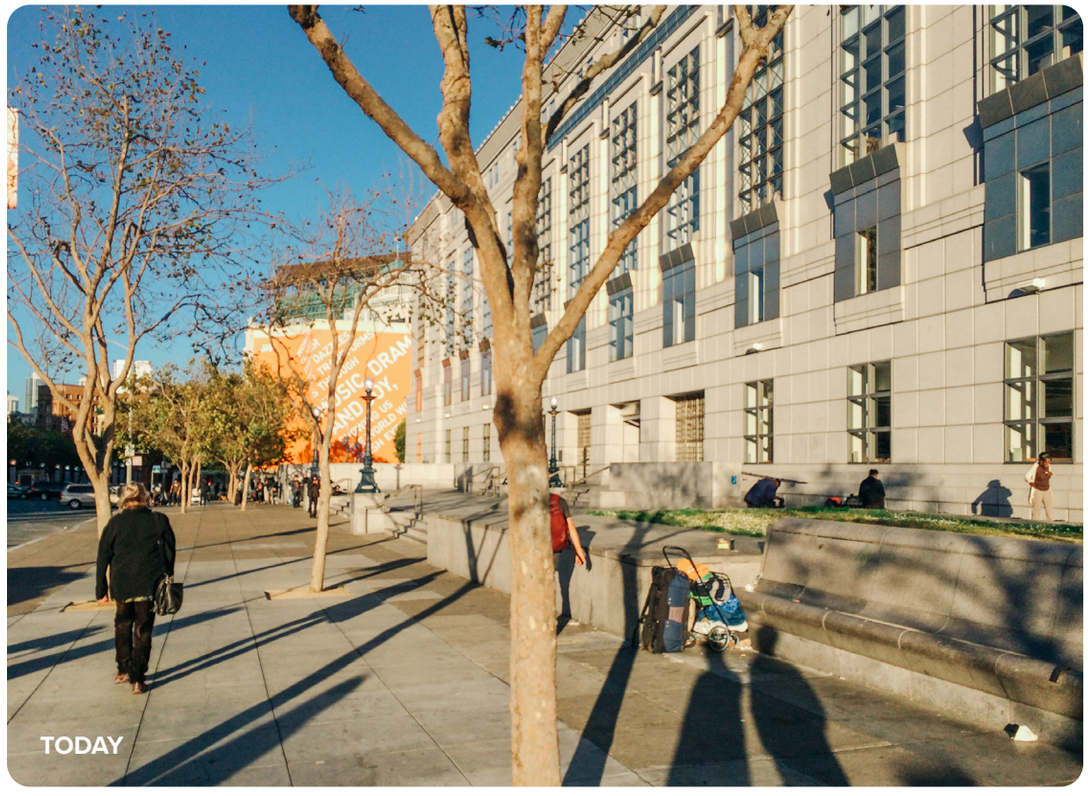
INVITING THE LIBRARY AND THE MUSEUM OUTSIDE

Though currently devoted mostly to parking, Fulton Street could be an inviting part of Civic Center's public realm: flanked by the Asian Art Museum and SF Public Library Main Branch buildings, the street has a human scale and two world-class institutions at its edges. Policy 1.3 in the San Francisco General Plan calls for this segment of Fulton Street to be designed as a public space to complete the axis of public open space between City Hall and Market Street.

The Plan proposes that the wide roadway of Fulton Street be transformed into flexible lawn and paving panels which would support an array of activities and programmatic uses, inviting the museum, library, and other partners outside. The architecture of the museum and library buildings would have a strong impact on how this new public space area functions, and strategic changes to these existing buildings could support healthy and active public life between them.

The library's building edge could be transformed to support public use through the addition of small pavilions. Pavilions could serve a number of functions, such as public restrooms and space to read and socialize. The pavilions could also be a hub for services or information. They might be a home base for community ambassadors, an accessible venue for educational programming, or a service connection point for vulnerable populations, such as those experiencing homelessness. An opening of the Asian Art Museum on the Fulton Street side of the building could also be programmed with public amenities, such as a sculpture garden.

Both the Asian Art Museum and the library have already experimented with activating their building edges through programming and temporary projects. On the Asian Art Museum side, the Village Artist Corner mural wall has brought rotating public art and free programming to Fulton Street for several years. The library hosts outdoor events, including hosting a temporary public art exhibit to the building's Larkin and Fulton Street terraces in collaboration with the Exploratorium. The success of these projects suggests that interventions around building edges could help create engaging public space on both sides of Fulton.

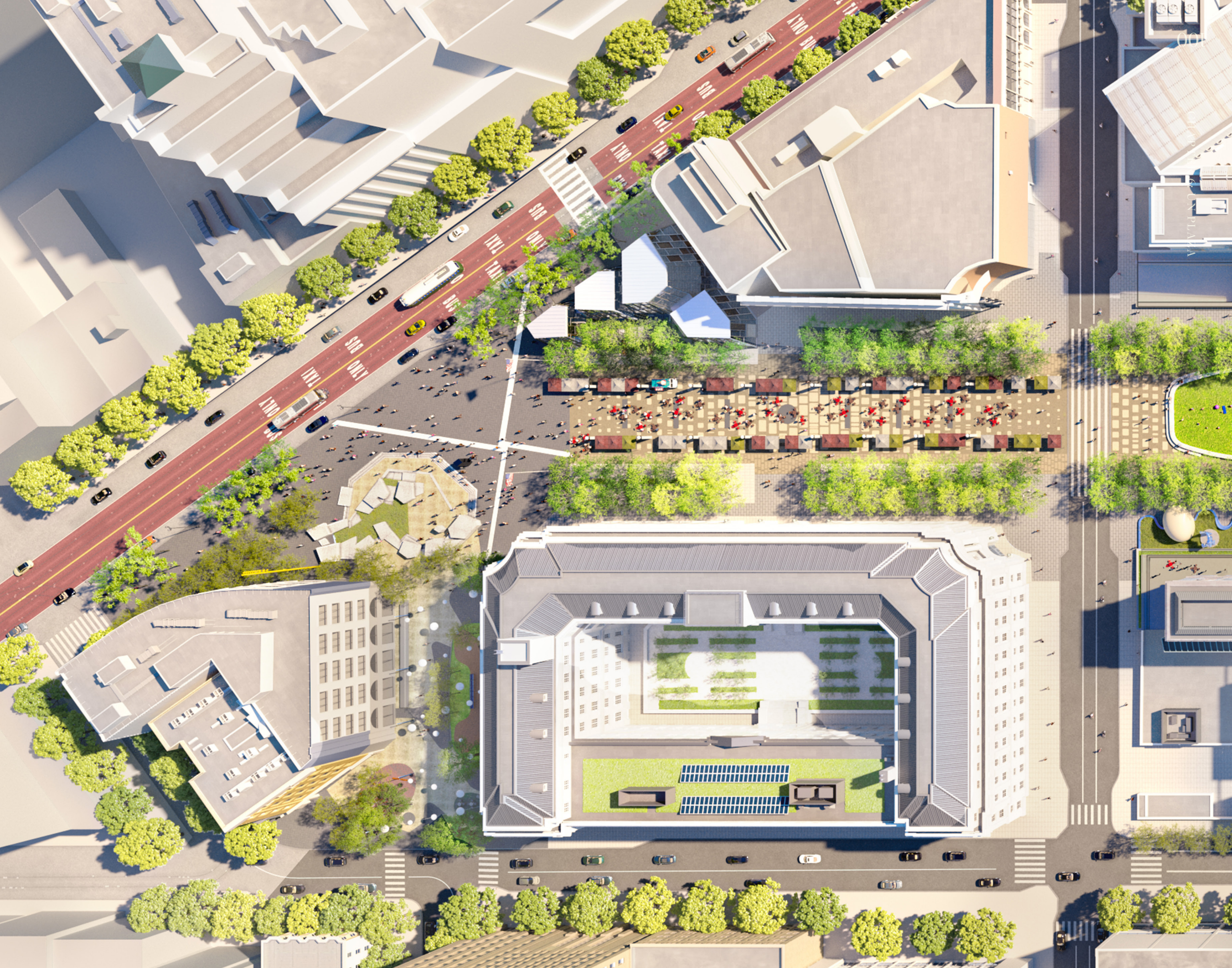




Today, the Fulton Street terrace of the SFPL building features a building entrance and is home to programming that provides critical services to people experiencing homelessness – such as free weekly showers in collaboration with the non-profit organization Lava-Mae, shown on the top right. The library has also hosted story time and musical events on the terrace on occasion.



The Plan proposes introducing small-scale pavilions on the Fulton Street side of the library building. Pavilions could provide needed amenities – such as public restrooms – and be a hub for information and public services. For example, they could be an accessible venue for educational programming or a connection point for Civic Center's most vulnerable populations, such as those experiencing homelessness.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CHAPTER 6
UN PLAZA

Site-Specific Proposals: United Nations Plaza / Leavenworth Gateway

APPROACH + CONSIDERATIONS

Opened in conjunction with the Civic Center BART Station, United Nations (UN) Plaza was designed by landscape architect Lawrence Halprin and was built as part of the Market Street Redevelopment Plan in the 1970s. The plaza commemorates the signing of the United Nations Charter at the War Memorial Complex in 1945.

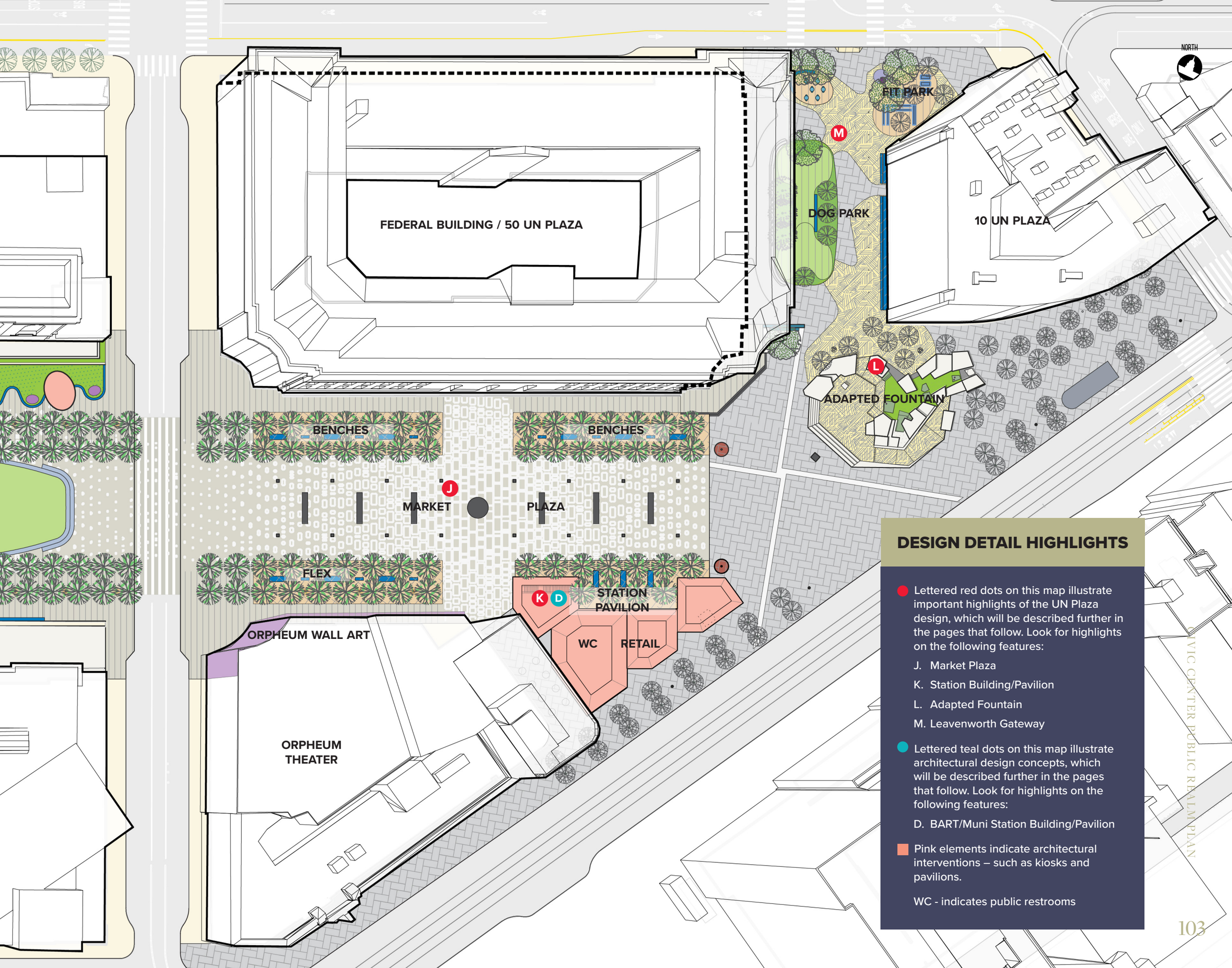
UN Plaza is an important open space for the SoMa and Tenderloin neighborhoods. Other nearby users include UC Law SF to the north, businesses within the Mid-Market area to the east, and thousands of commuters who pass through the area on a daily basis. A large community asset that operates in UN Plaza is the Heart of the City Farmers' Market which was founded in the early 1980s in response to a number of challenges. The twice-weekly Farmers' Market has successfully brought together the space's diverse constituencies. In 2023 the Market was temporarily located to Fulton Street Mall to make way for temporary activations in UN Plaza. The most prevalent challenges facing UN Plaza include illegal activity that is primarily focused in less-visible and low-traffic areas around the BART Station and fountain, something these temporary activations seek to mitigate.

The Concept Plan for UN Plaza acknowledges the commemoration of the UN Charter while adding new neighborhood uses that build on successes. The Plan includes three main areas of focus: a market plaza area framed by seating under trees; a flexible gateway plaza at Market Street with a new pavilion at the BART station that encloses its entrance while providing new uses to enliven the space; and a neighborhood gateway on Leavenworth Street between the Federal Building and 10 UN Plaza, with new park uses that connect the Tenderloin to Civic Center.

The map on the following page provides several highlights of design proposals for the plaza.







DESIGN DETAIL HIGHLIGHTS

- Lettered red dots on this map illustrate important highlights of the UN Plaza design, which will be described further in the pages that follow. Look for highlights on the following features:
  - J. Market Plaza
  - K. Station Building/Pavilion
  - L. Adapted Fountain
  - M. Leavenworth Gateway
- Lettered teal dots on this map illustrate architectural design concepts, which will be described further in the pages that follow. Look for highlights on the following features:
  - D. BART/Muni Station Building/Pavilion
- Pink elements indicate architectural interventions – such as kiosks and pavilions.

WC - indicates public restrooms

J

A CENTRAL MARKET PLAZA

The Public Realm Plan proposes a refurbishment of the existing plaza between the Federal Building and the Orpheum Theater. This plaza is intended to support markets in the plaza with new infrastructure and more efficient layout of usable space to serve key plaza users, particularly the Heart of the City Farmers' Market, which was founded in the early 1980s and provides fresh produce to a variety of stakeholders - from low-income families to employees of nearby offices. The plaza provides space and flexibility for markets to continue and expand, both within UN Plaza and west onto Fulton Street Mall if desired. The diagram on the following page provides additional details about how the redesigned space will support markets in UN Plaza.



K

A NEW BART/MUNI STATION PAVILION

A new pavilion at the Civic Center/UN Plaza Station would enclose the existing entrance. At the most basic level, the building protects riders and critical station infrastructure - such as escalators - from the elements. The building also creates space for new uses that enliven UN Plaza and invite people to linger. For example, the ground floor of the building could be used for a food and beverage establishment that complements the Farmers' Market, perhaps offering evening activities after the market winds down, featuring ingredients sourced from market vendors. Or, it might provide space for a market hall where interested vendors could have a more permanent presence. A second floor could be used for a community space. The design, programming, and stewardship of this building would need to be further explored through additional design and community input. This Plan aims to illustrate how a future building at this site could enhance public life on the plaza.



How will the design support markets like the Heart of the City Farmers' Market?

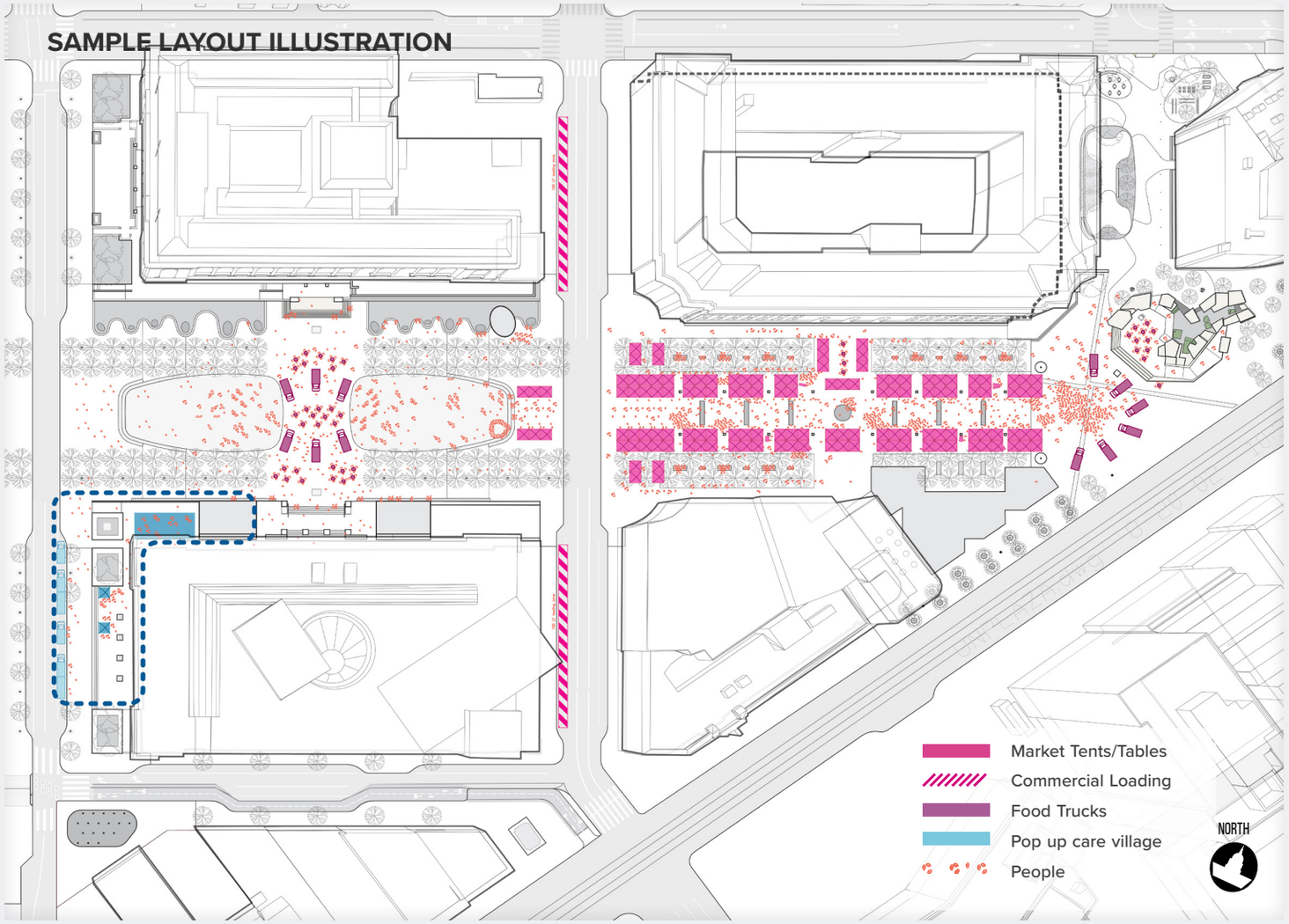
The Heart of the City Farmers' Market was one of the most consistently valued and popular events and activities identified through the Public Realm Plan's outreach.

A crucial source of fresh, affordable food for neighbors, the Market also draws a wide spectrum of employees from the district to citywide residents, and provides economic opportunities both locally and regionally. Twice a week, it embodies the Plan's aspirations for inclusivity and equitable access.

The Public Realm Plan proposes a refurbishment of the existing plaza between the Federal Building and the Orpheum Theater that will provide space and flexibility for the market to continue and expand, both within UN Plaza and west onto Fulton Street Mall if desired. A few key adjustments in the Plan aim to make Market operations easier, such as removal of the granite curbs that currently surround the trees flanking the Federal Building and Orpheum Theater, restricting booth and loading space.

The diagram at the right provides one possible illustration of how the new design could accommodate the Farmers' Market, as well as other important community-serving events. This is just one potential layout, intended to create a "test fit" to illustrate how the market could continue to operate and expand in the new plaza.

In 2023 the Market was relocated to Fulton Street Mall to accommodate activation and programming in UN Plaza. This activation has brought positive activity within the space and also discourages negative activity that had challenged the space. This Plan proposes additional activation and programming that would continue this effort and design changes that support the Market, whether it remain in Fulton Street Mall or return to UN Plaza.



L

AN ADAPTED FOUNTAIN

UN Plaza retains a high degree of historic integrity compared to the other public spaces in the district, meaning the plaza's design still conveys its historical associations or attributes. In particular, the UN Plaza fountain has inspired passionate advocates and opponents since its opening. Identified in the Better Market Street Cultural Landscape Evaluation (CLE) as a significant example of Lawrence Halprin's work, the CLE describes the fountain as:

- Designed to symbolize the major continents of the world, represented by large granite block clusters; the earth's oceans, represented by pools of water; and the lost continent of Atlantis, represented by lower central granite blocks.
- Tall, arcing jets of water, intended to be visible from Market Street and the Plaza, operated on a 2-minute cycle that symbolized the tidal movement of the Earth's oceans.

According to the CLE, the pumps and systems required to create the tidal effect have not been operational since the early 1980s; overspray of chemically treated water from this feature also necessitated the removal of several trees that created a setting for the fountain. In 2019 the fountain was fenced and barricaded. Functionally, it creates a barrier between the rest of UN Plaza and Leavenworth Street/the Tenderloin, and does not meet modern ADA access standards.

The Plan acknowledges the enduring opportunities and challenges associated with the fountain. A series of reversible modifications could protect the fountain's historic integrity and design intent while adapting it to provide visibility, access, and planting. The rendering at right shows the proposed adaptations, which include accessible circulation connecting UN Plaza to Leavenworth through the fountain, and a small interactive water feature that could also function as a paved area for small performances or movable seating. The remaining portion of the lowest level of the fountain could be modified as a planted garden for storm water detention.









LEAVENWORTH GATEWAY

Leavenworth Street between the Federal Building and 10 UN Plaza is transformed from a connector alley to neighborhood park that features amenities prioritized by neighborhood residents in the community outreach process: a dog park, fitness park, community message board, and game tables. Dramatic lighting marks the gateway day and night, and special paving reinvigorates the space as a welcome mat that connects the Tenderloin to Civic Center's public spaces. Several projects from this Plan, including a dog park, have already been implemented by the Civic Center CBD.





Image: Civic Center CBD

CASE STUDY D

Civic Center/UN Plaza Station Building

A new BART/Muni station entrance building anchors the plaza, creating a welcoming gateway to Civic Center

ACTIVATED ENTRANCES

The Civic Center/UN Plaza BART and Muni station at UN Plaza has some of the highest BART ridership in the regional transit system and is the fourth busiest station in the system. Though many people pass through the transit entrance on UN Plaza, amenities are scarce. The entrance currently features an uncovered escalator surrounded by a planter with sparse trees.

BART has implemented a project throughout the Market Street corridor to upgrade, cover, and secure escalators and elevators. The Civic Center/UN Plaza entrance includes equipment upgrades. These projects could create synergy for a larger intervention that would enhance public life on the plaza and offer new amenities to transit users: a station building sitting atop the escalator opening there today.

A building over the Civic Center/UN Plaza BART and Muni station could take many forms. The rendering at right shows one potential scenario: a two-story Market Hall and Transit Pavilion, acting as a significant anchor for the plaza. Uses within the building could be designed to support the existing Heart of the City Farmers' Market – for example, providing permanent space for interested vendors, perhaps those that require infrastructure and back of house facilities like a bakery, butcher, or fishmonger. If the building had a second floor, it could feature a community room for events and programs.

The City is currently exploring the possibility of a station building in greater detail to determine what is possible and what design approaches might best serve community needs. This work is guided by several design principles for the building, based on community input:

- Improve access and comfort for transit users;
- Support successful plaza programming, such as the Heart of the City Farmers' Market; and
- Maximize street activation and visual transparency.

A feasibility analysis and program verification of the ideas advanced by this Plan were completed by the City in 2024. The next step is to secure funding for design, environmental review, project approval(s), construction, and operation.





The Civic Center/UN Plaza BART and Muni station entrance has benefited from regular programming that has brought food, drink and retail amenities to the plaza for many years – examples include Off the Grid lunchtime food truck markets, the UN Plaza Gift Gallery, and Heart of the City Farmers' Market. A future station building could build off of the energy of these successful programs and provide a permanent anchor for amenities and activities.







A building over the Civic Center/UN Plaza BART and MUNI station could take many forms. The renderings above shows one potential scenario: a two-story Market Hall and Transit Pavilion. The City is currently continuing to explore the possibility of a station building in greater detail to determine what is possible and what design approaches might best serve community needs.

CHAPTER 7
IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation Overview

The Plan will be implemented in phases in response to community need and emerging opportunities

ADDRESSING A COMMUNITY NEED

The Civic Center Public Realm Plan is rooted in deep community conversation. This engagement built this vision and uncovered gaps in services highlighting the very real need and dire state of public space within the Civic Center area. The Plan acknowledges that change is incremental and that the ideas advanced here should be flexible enough to adapt to future needs and desires.

Civic Center's public spaces are the most important and visible civic spaces within San Francisco. They provide crucial open space for the open space-deficient Tenderloin, Mid-Market, and SoMa neighborhoods - among the city's densest and lowest-income areas.

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of equitable access to quality open space and today's Civic Center does not meet the everyday needs for these communities. The Civic Center vision would transform these public spaces into usable, green, recreational space for neighboring communities - a "green oasis" - while strengthening their role as civic space for events, protests, and festivals for the city as a whole.

The Plan, in coordination with other City initiatives, sets forth a 100-year vision to implement community-supported capital improvements that will address the inequities of access to open space and amenities for some of our most vulnerable populations. It creates a road map for upgrading the area, ensuring that Civic Center serves existing neighborhoods, including 6,300 new housing units, for decades to come. The time for responsive, flexible, and inclusive public space is now.

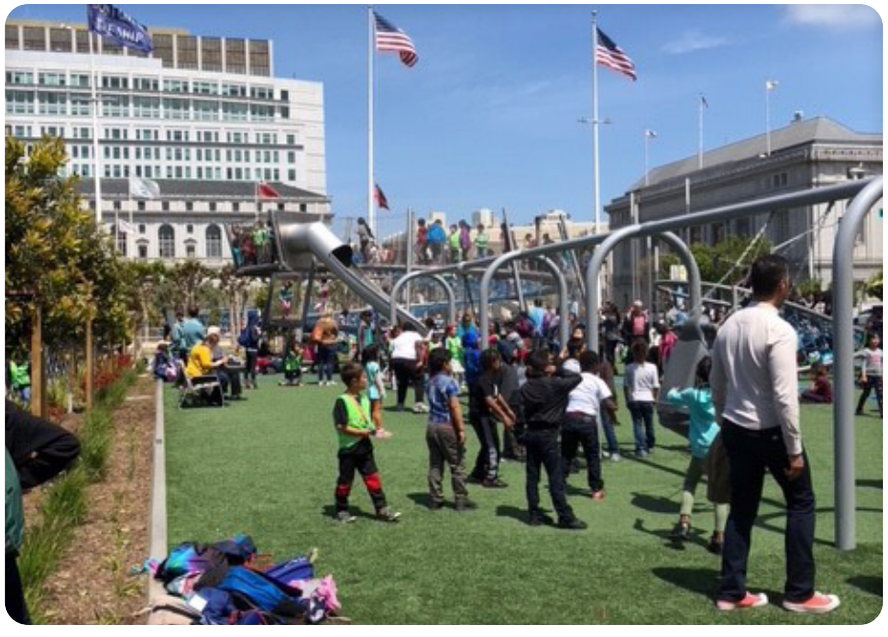
A PHASED APPROACH

The Civic Center Public Realm Plan sets out a bold vision for re-imagining Civic Center's public spaces and streets. Implementing the Plan will require continued community engagement, significant funding and strong collaboration between the City and partners, including building owners, tenants, and community-based organizations.

Given the expense, complexities, and coordination needed, the Plan is best implemented using a phased approach. This will ensure flexibility as opportunities, funding and partnerships arise. This Plan document and the policies within it create a road map for bringing more amenities and investment to Civic Center, but more detailed design proposals will need to be explored as individual aspects of the Plan are advanced and stakeholder input will be critical to advancing key concepts recommended by the Plan.

Prior to implementation, the City would conduct environmental review, as applicable, on detailed design proposals for discrete individual projects or for groups of interconnected projects. Upon completion of CEQA compliance, projects would be presented for approval.

One phased approach could start with redesigning Fulton Street Mall from a parking lot into a flexible plaza and recreational space. Discussed in Chapter 5, Fulton Mall could include more trees, active porches at the Library and Asian Art Museum, seating, and pavilions. Fulton Mall improvements are cost-effective and would support and build on years of proven activation and programming of this space. Recurrent closures also occur to provide space for activation and Heart of the City Farmers' Market. Much of the programming work has been sponsored and organized by the City and area partners.





The City and community partners are already working to make Civic Center more inviting. Recent investments, such as the Helen Diller Civic Center Playgrounds and Café Kiosk, have brought new life to Civic Center Plaza. At the same time, amenities can be added through temporary projects, such as the mural wall and movable tables and chairs outside the Asian Art Museum, at the corner of Fulton and Larkin Streets.

Because of this recent activation work, and the policy support to close the street, this project may be a good candidate for early-phase implementation and is reflected as such in the phasing diagram in the following pages. The next step for this project would be to secure funding for design, environmental review, project approval(s), construction, and operation.

The following pages include diagrams illustrating potential concepts for phased implementation, outlining one scenario for how segments of the Public Realm Plan could be advanced as resources and opportunities arise. This diagram is conceptual, and should not be considered a detailed implementation plan. Detailed plans around implementation will need to be developed with consideration for city priorities, cost estimates, available resources, and additional stakeholder input.

While implementing a vision of this magnitude takes time, there are also many steps the City and community partners can take to bring amenities to Civic Center in the near-term. This chapter also highlights near-term projects that have been implemented, some of which are ongoing, in an effort to make Civic Center's public spaces more welcoming. Undertaken through a collaborative project called the Civic Center Initiative, these projects provide important learnings to guide all phases of Plan implementation. In addition, other agencies and community based organizations have advanced several near-term projects informed by this Plan.

MEMORIALIZING THE PLAN

One important next step to advance implementation is environmental clearance. Given the long-term vision for the Plan and the anticipated phasing for funding and implementation, the City would conduct environmental review for individual project elements or groups of interconnected projects as the sufficient project detail is available for environmental review.

This Plan document is endorsed by the Planning Commission and the City and partners continue to explore implementation in greater detail, taking into account evolving needs, other area initiatives, community priorities, funding opportunities, and emerging partnerships.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Funding is critical to advancing any vision into a built reality. Comprehensive engineering cost estimates were undertaken for the conceptual designs advanced by the Plan. Like environmental review, phasing projects over time would make implementation more feasible.

This Plan outlines a massive investment in public infrastructure, centered around public space and seismic investments. There is precedent within the City for public and private funding opportunities for a project(s) of this scale. Sources are varied and can be combined in combination. Implementation should be consistent with, and honor the vision built by the community.

Public Funding: Voter approved bonds for capital improvements have been used to fund larger public projects within the City including India Basin Park (900 Innes Ave), Japantown Peace Plaza, and Buchanan Street Mall. This includes general obligation (GO) bonds which are approved by the voters of San Francisco and are backed by the City's property tax revenue and repaid directly out of property taxes. This requires voter approval and the City would pay this back over time. Similarly park bonds are approved by the voters and used for neighborhood park projects.

Private Funding is often undertaken for large, transformative projects of this scale and has been used for projects like Tunnel Tops Park, which had a combination of $20 Million from the Presidio Trust and $98 Million raised by the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy. The potential for funding often depends on an advocacy group that can champion fundraising and advancement of implementation consistent with the community-built vision. Similarly, India Basin Waterfront Park also benefits from private donors.

Grants also exist from various sources that can help fund the planning, design and capital costs of implementing this Plan. Grants often target different aspects of a project; some funding transportation and safety improvements, some funding bicycle infrastructure improvements, and others funding open space improvements associated with new housing and regional growth, climate resiliency, safe routes to school, and many others. Examples of grants include One Bay Area Grant (OBAG), community placemaking grants, and state and federal grants. Grants can be especially nimble when considering projects that can advance independently as part of the whole.

Other funding sources, both public and private may exist and the aforementioned sources are not an exhaustive list. Creative thinking and advocacy will be the foundation of implementing the ambitions of this Plan, and can happen at multiple scales. This combined with the suggested phasing can inform the pursuit of funding both in terms of sources and total amounts. The onus will lie on the City and advocacy groups to move this forward, and should not be shouldered by the neighborhood community groups who are under resourced and not equipped to champion a Plan of this scale on their own.

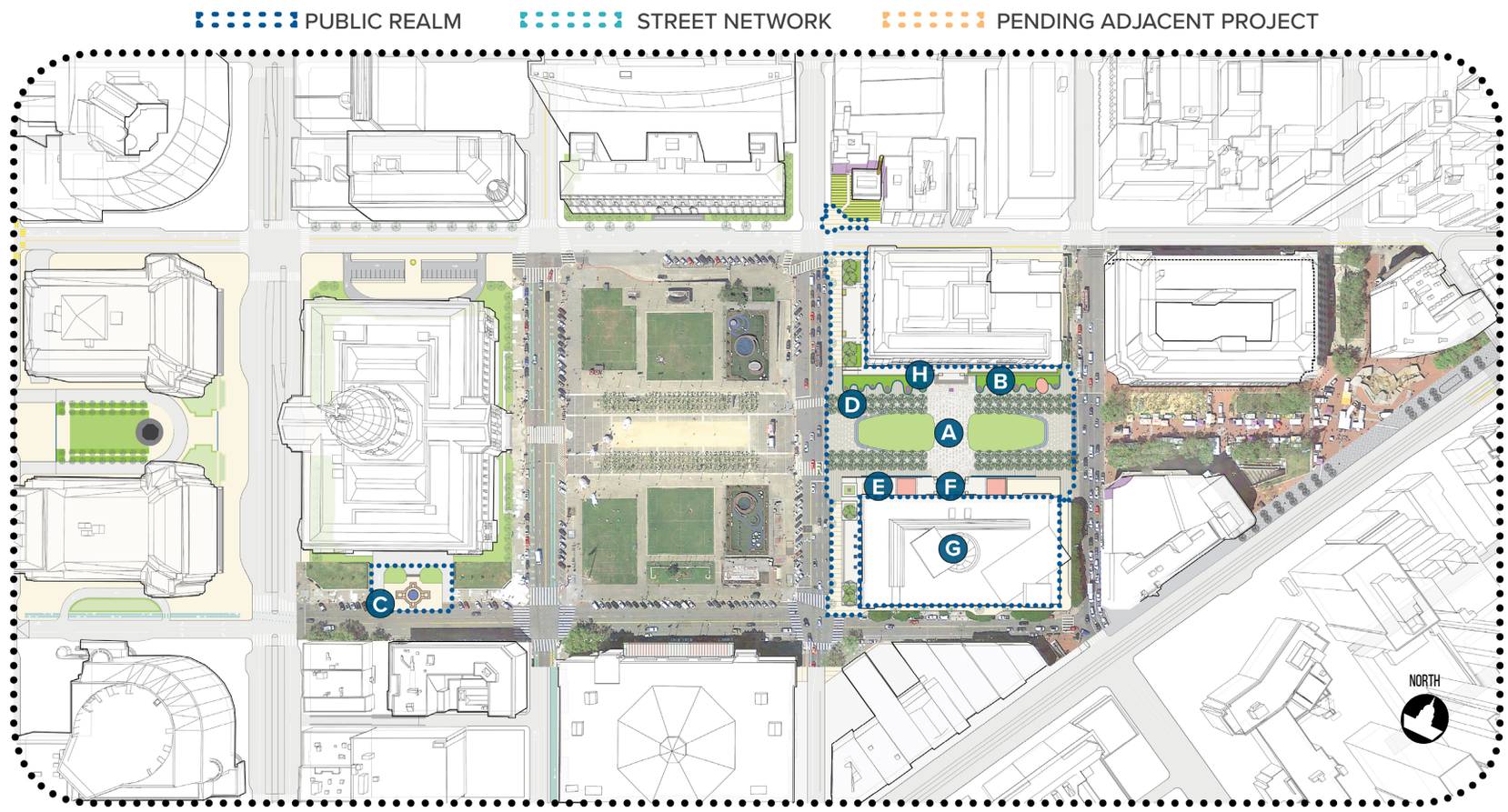
Phased Implementation Scenario Illustration

The following diagrams illustrates one potential scenario for phased implementation, outlining how segments of the Public Realm Plan could be advanced as resources, partnerships, and other opportunities arise.

PHASE 1A: FULTON MALL

This diagram illustrates the concept of phased implementation, outlining one scenario for how segments of the Public Realm Plan could be advanced as resources and opportunities arise. These diagrams are conceptual, and should not be considered a detailed implementation plan. Detailed plans around implementation will need to be developed with consideration for city priorities, available resources, and additional stakeholder input.

These diagrams are conceptual and subject to change. Prior to implementation and with further community and stakeholder input, project designs would be refined and undergo CEQA, as applicable. This would be followed by project approval(s).



Physical Improvements

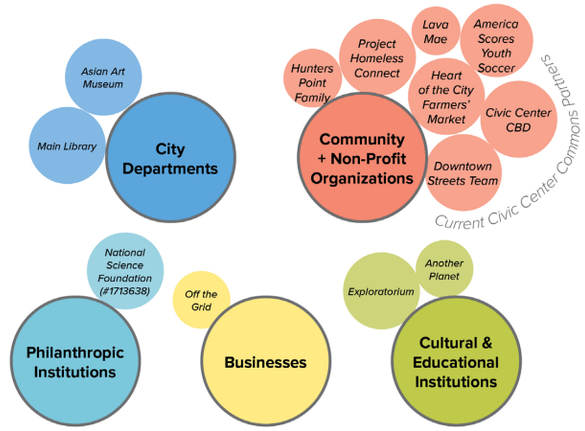
PUBLIC REALM

- (A) Lawn Terraces and Flexible Plaza
- (B) Sculpture Garden
- (C) Relocate Pioneer Monument
- (D) Trees Framing Civic Promenade
- (E) Outdoor Reading Room at SFPL

ARCHITECTURE

- (F) Library Terrace Pavilions + Food Kiosk
- (G) Potential SFPL Interior Renovations
- (H) Accessible Entrance to Asian Art Museum - Fulton Mall

Key Partners and Stakeholders



PHASE 1B: LEAVENWORTH GATEWAY

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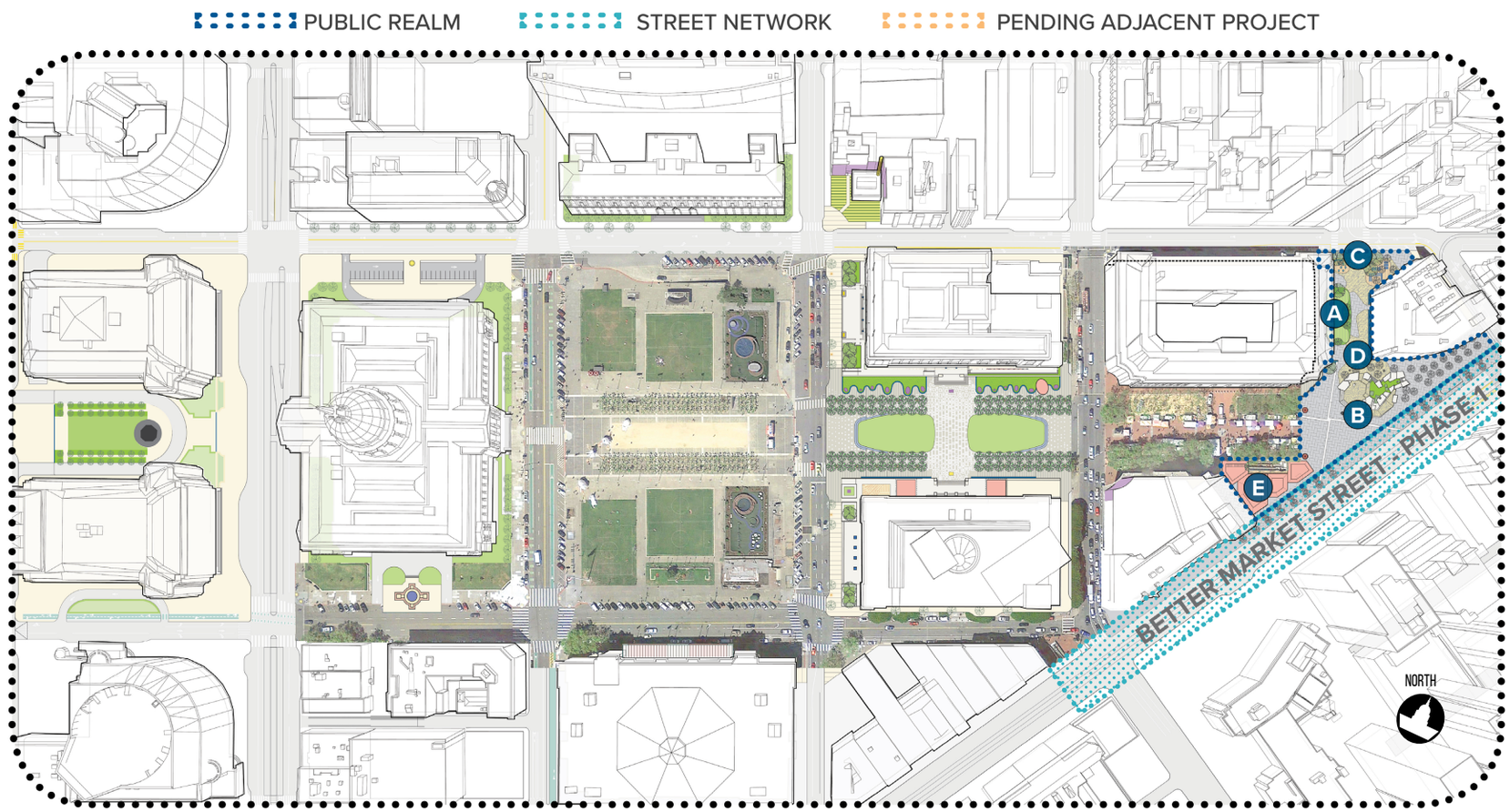


Physical Improvements

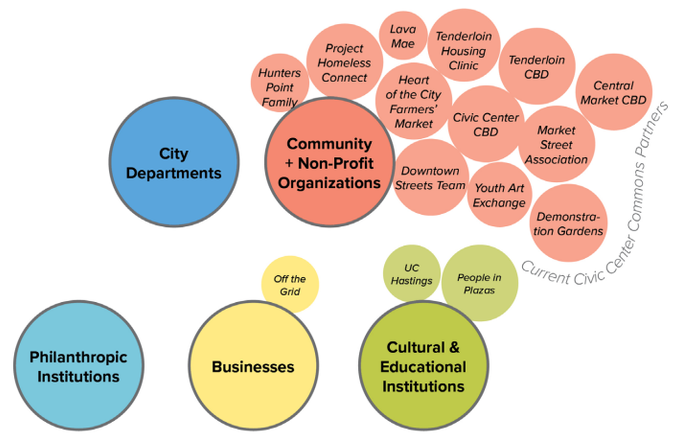
PUBLIC REALM

- (A) Dog Park
- (B) Fountain Retrofit + Adaptation
- (C) Fit Park and Community Message Board
- (D) New Trees, Paving, + Lighting

ARCHITECTURE

- (E) UN Plaza - BART Pavilion

Key Partners and Stakeholders



PHASE 2: CULTURE CORRIDOR

This diagram illustrates the concept of phased implementation, outlining one scenario for how segments of the vision Public Realm Plan could be advanced as resources and opportunities arise. These diagrams are conceptual, and should not be considered a detailed implementation plan. Detailed plans around implementation will need to be developed with consideration for city priorities, available resources, and additional stakeholder input.

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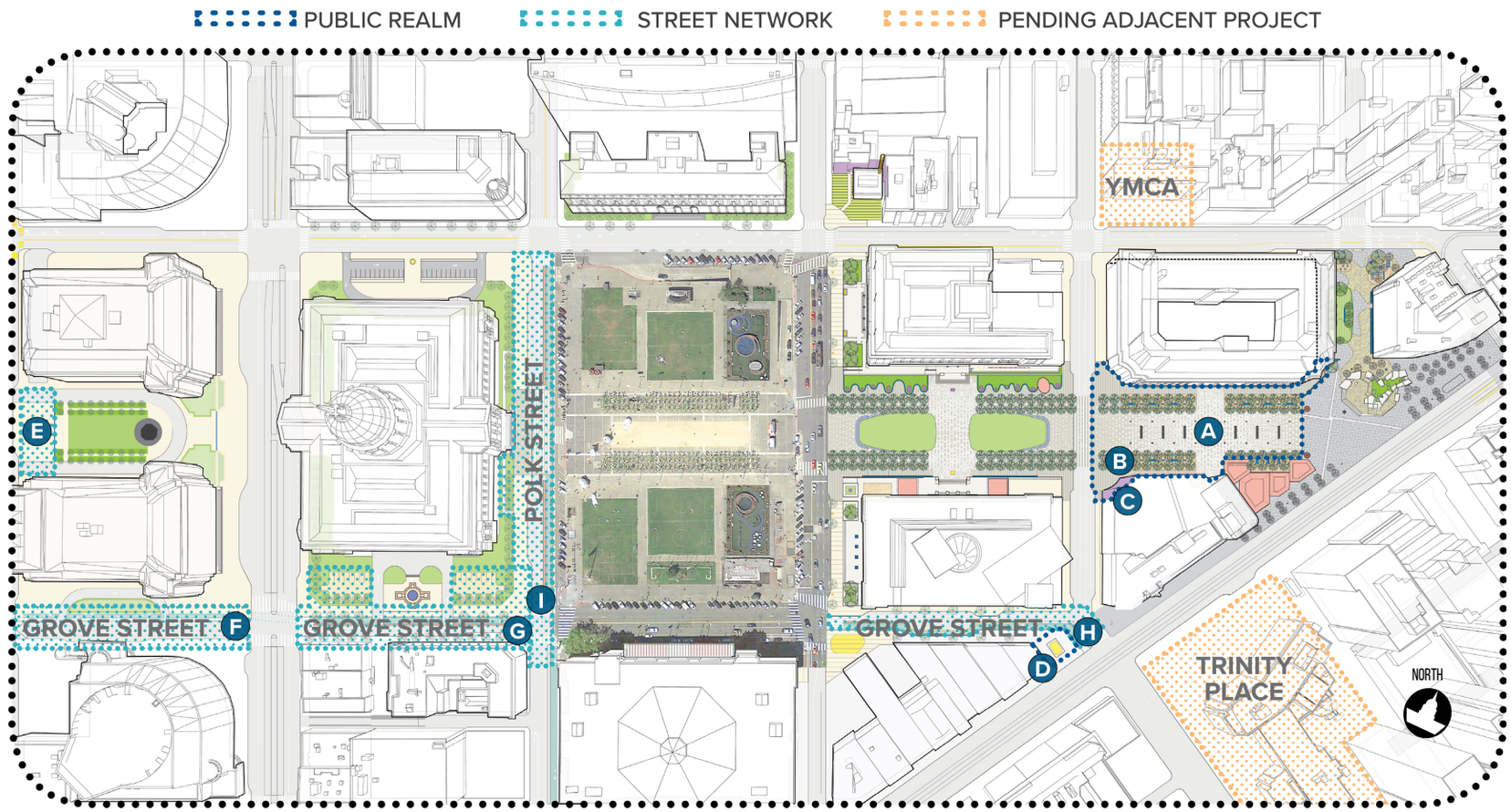


Physical Improvements

PUBLIC REALM

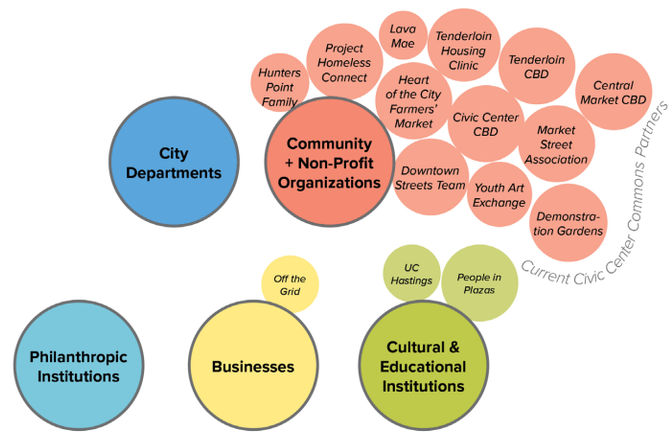
- A Flexible Market Plaza + New Paving, Lighting
- B Trees Framing Civic Promenade
- C Public Art - Facade Installation at Orpheum
- D Relocate Simon Bolivar Monument
- E War Memorial Gateway

STREETS**

- F Grove Street: Franklin to Van Ness
- G Grove Street: Van Ness to Polk
- H Grove Street: Larkin to Market
- I Polk Street: Grove to McAllister

***Tentative pending further street analysis, design, and costing.*

Key Partners and Stakeholders



PHASE 3:
CIVIC CENTER PLAZA

This diagram illustrates the concept of phased implementation, outlining one scenario for how segments of the Public Realm Plan could be advanced as resources and opportunities arise. These diagrams are conceptual, and should not be considered a detailed implementation plan. Detailed plans around implementation will need to be developed with consideration for city priorities, available resources, and additional stakeholder input.

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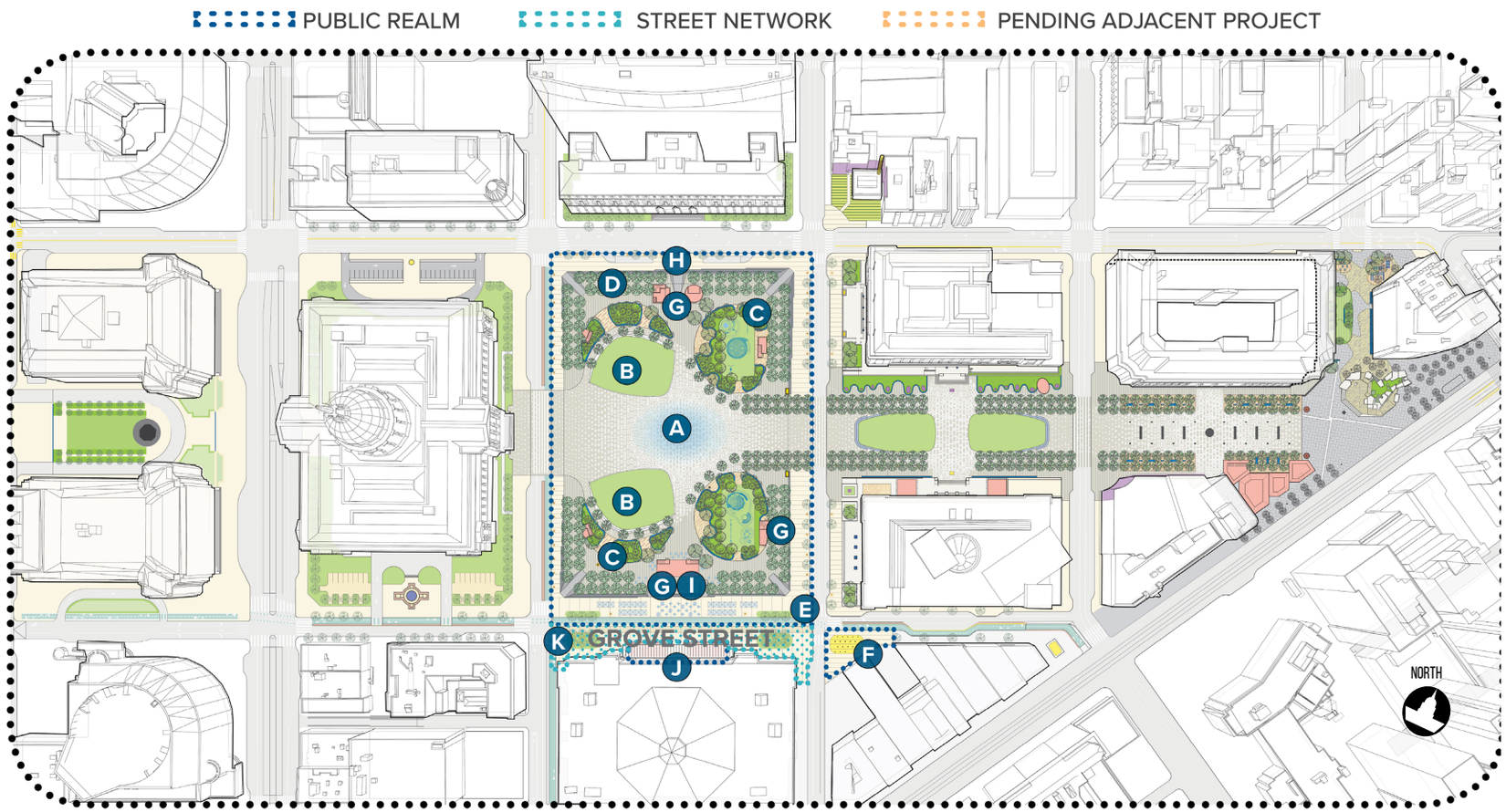


Physical Improvements

PUBLIC REALM

- A Flexible Plaza and Mirror Fountain
- B Flexible Lawns
- C Gardens of Delight + Memory
- D Evergreen Tree Frame + Garden Trees
- E Expanded Public Realm / Sidewalk (All Streets)
- F Public Art - Flagpole Grove

ARCHITECTURE

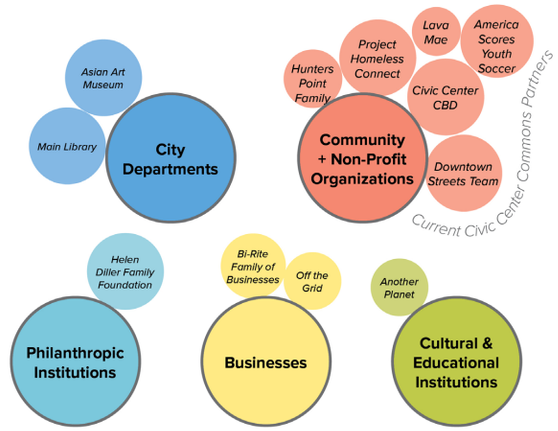
- G New Bathrooms, Retail, and Access Structures
- H Civic Center Garage Ramp Relocation + Retrofit
- I Brooks Hall Structural Retrofit
- J Retail Pavilions at Bill Graham Civic Auditorium

STREETS**

- K Grove Street: Polk to Larkin

***Tentative pending further street analysis, design, and costing.*

Key Partners and Stakeholders



Near-term Improvements

What can we do quickly? And, what can we learn from it?

BACKGROUND

There is a strong need to continue making Civic Center's public spaces more welcoming to a diverse range of users. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored how important it is that every San Franciscan have access to quality open space. The neighborhoods adjacent to Civic Center – such as the Tenderloin and SoMa – currently lack sufficient open space to serve their dense and diverse populations. Civic Center serves as a park and critical large-scale open space for these neighborhoods. It is important to continue bringing new amenities to the area today, as the City looks towards Plan implementation in the future.

Near-term activation brings much-needed benefits to existing residents, and is an important part of the process of refining and implementing design concepts proposed in this Plan. Often referred to as "urban prototyping," "tactical urbanism," or "rapid implementation", the idea is that temporary projects can provide immediate community benefits and important take-aways to influence capital upgrades. They also create platforms for community organizations to get involved through events and small-scale projects.

San Francisco has used near-term activation across a range of urban design contexts. Examples include:

- Implementing COVID-19 rapid response initiatives, such as the Shared Spaces program, helped businesses quickly and creatively activate sidewalks, streets, and open lots for business.
- Utilizing Groundplay to quickly activate the streets and sidewalks in their neighborhood, like Play Streets, parklets, and art.
- Implementing pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements on the City's Vision Zero High Injury Network via SFMTA's Quick Build program.
- Activating ground floor spaces, such as the former The Hall, which featured a food stalls, bar and community space that occupied the ground floor of a building that was waiting to be replaced by a new development that was undergoing entitlement.



Tables and Chairs

Seating is a basic element of a welcoming public space. Early public outreach and existing conditions analyses for the Plan underscored that seating was sorely needed in Civic Center, and the City was able to quickly implement a seating program through the Civic Center Initiative. Since 2016, movable tables and chairs have been deployed daily in all three Civic Center public spaces. The program provides an immediate community benefit and has helped further demonstrate the high demand for seating. As resources grow, this program can expand and integrate lessons learned:

- Flexibility is valuable – movable tables/chairs allow people to shift between shady or sunny areas.
- Convenient storage is needed so movable seating can be scaled up when needed.
- People like variety to allow for both group and individual seating.

RAPID IMPLEMENTATION IN CIVIC CENTER

The Civic Center Initiative

From 2015 to 2020, the Civic Center Initiative was focused on bringing new amenities and improved stewardship to the three linked public spaces that connect City Hall to Market Street: Civic Center Plaza, UN Plaza, and Fulton Street between the Asian Art Museum and the San Francisco Main Public Library. The Initiative aimed to make Civic Center more welcoming in the near-term, while helping catalyze implementation of the Civic Center Public Realm Plan.

Led by the City in partnership with neighbors, community organizations, and cultural institutions, the Initiative brought together the best of San Francisco's creative, philanthropic, and intellectual resources to bring new amenities to the city's central civic spaces so that everyone feels welcome and experiences the best of San Francisco every day. The pages ahead detail specific projects that have already jump-started implementation of the vision and community goals set forth in the Public Realm Plan. Highlights include:

- **New daily attractions.** Examples include the Asian Art Museum's dragon-themed outdoor art gallery on Fulton Street and food truck markets.
- **Improved safety and stewardship.** Innovative workforce development partnerships improve safety and cleanliness while providing jobs to people with barriers to employment.
- **Management Planning.** To be successful, Civic Center's public spaces need a management strategy. A dedicated group of public and private partners is needed to ensure that the area has the staffing and funding needed to expand services and amenities in the future. This could include community-based organizations, individuals, private sector business, community benefit districts, the City, and others.

The Initiative is now managed by the Civic Center CBD and continues to bring activation, programming, and life to Civic Center.

Improved stewardship through innovative workforce development partnerships

An important step in early activation efforts in Civic Center's public spaces was improving cleanliness and safety so that all feel welcome. Through the Civic Center Initiative, the City advanced this goal through workforce development partnerships.

A core feature of this work is a proactively inclusive approach. Job creation for those with barriers to employment is a priority, and the City is partnering with two non-profit organizations to enhance stewardship while providing jobs to the community.

The first organization is Urban Alchemy. Urban Alchemy employs a crew of practitioners who act as docents for the play structures and art installations and monitors for the colorful tables and chairs. Urban Alchemy's staff, who have overcome significant barriers to employment, also monitor the Pit Stop toilets at Civic Center and UN Plazas. These toilets are a critical basic amenity, providing clean public restrooms to the public.

The second organization, Downtown Streets Team engages a crew of unhoused people – many from the immediate area – to participate in light cleaning in exchange for stipends and case management services. Downtown Streets Team also offered free games and activities through KARTMA, a mobile game-lending cart.

In addition, social services organizations such as Lava Mae and Project Homeless Connect have provided targeted services for unhoused individuals throughout Civic Center's public spaces. Services included weekly showers and regular "pop-up care villages" to create a convenient one-stop-shop for a diverse range of social services. Giving space to these types of supportive service activations is a foundational tenet of this Plan.

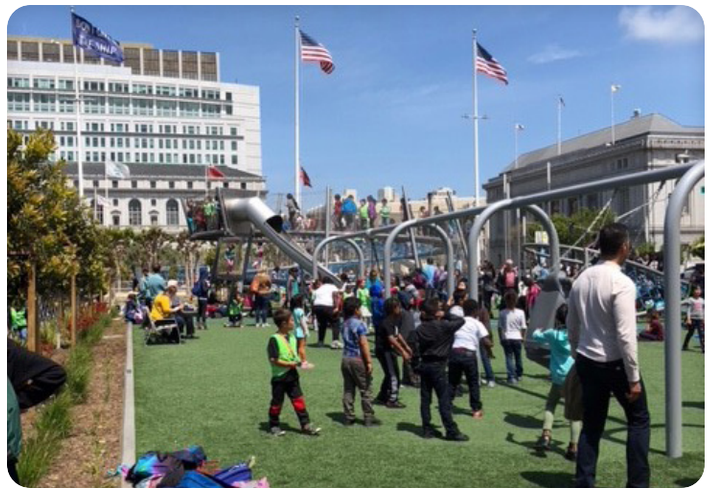






Civic Center Plaza - Near Term Improvements

This and following pages highlight projects that have already begun to improve offerings in Civic Center in line with community needs and goals. In addition to making Civic Center more inviting for the people who use it today, these projects provide important learnings that can help jump-start implementation of the Public Realm Plan.



PLAYGROUNDS

Opened in February 2018, the playgrounds are an example of how high-quality daily attractions can serve neighborhood public space needs and provide needed play space for children who live in the adjacent Tenderloin and Mid-Market neighborhoods.



CAFÉ KIOSK

Opened in October 2018, the Kiosk has become a popular destination. There is significant demand for human-scaled places to gather, eat, and meet in the plaza.



ROTATING PUBLIC ART

The San Francisco Arts Commission has already brought world class art to the plaza on a temporary basis. The success of recent projects demonstrates the value and popularity of rotating public art.



SEATING & GAMES

Movable tables and chairs, as well as free games, have been successful due to their flexibility. These elements can be brought in and out each day and can be scaled up or down based the needs/use of the plaza.



FREE PROGRAMMING

Free evening and weekend events have brought out tens of thousands of people, primarily those who live or work nearby. Events have also recruited program partners who are invested in activating Civic Center.



SEASONAL AMENITIES

The Winter Park Ice Rink has helped establish the plaza as a site for San Franciscans to come together to enjoy seasonal celebrations in the heart of the city.

Fulton Street - Near Term Improvements



FULL STREET CLOSURE

Monthly Block Parties helped bring to life the vision of transforming Fulton into a pedestrianized park environment. Strong attendance and participation from partners demonstrated demand for weekend events. Heart of the City Farmers' Market currently operates in the space twice weekly.



RECREATIONAL SPACE

The Summer 2019 Civic Center Street Soccer project tested the use of Fulton for recreational purposes with a three month pilot street closure and community soccer program. In 2022, the San FranDISCO roller rink operated, and provided a space for skating and music.



PUBLIC ART

The Village Artist Corner became a popular hub for public art outside the Asian Art Museum. Dedicated stewardship, rotating art, and frequent programming were key to the project's success.



INSTITUTIONS OUTSIDE

Through a partnership with Exploratorium on the Middle Ground project, the Public Library was able to create a new public gathering space and bring civic dialogue, inquiry, and learning outside building walls. This occurred in 2019-2020, and again in 2023-2024.



SEATING

Tables and chairs placed on the Larkin Terrace of the Public Library and the corner of Fulton and Larkin have been successful due to stewardship, adjacent programming, and proximity to bus drop off points.



CULTURAL PROGRAMMING

In October 2018, the SF Arts Commission's American Indian Initiative demonstrated the use of projection art to bring night-time cultural programming to Fulton Street in partnership with the Public Library Main Branch and the Asian Art Museum. (Photo: SFAC)

United Nations Plaza - Near Term Improvements



EXPANDED MARKETS

Could UN Plaza support additional markets? Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the successful Wednesday and Sunday Farmers' Market expanded to Friday, with additional programming at lunchtime on other days.



INTERACTIVE ART

The Exploratorium's Sound Commons project, in UN Plaza from 2016-2019, demonstrated the positive impact of well-stewarded and interactive public art.



RECREATION

The City has worked with community partners to test pop-up recreational programming in the plaza, such as dance classes. To be as successful as Zumba in Civic Center Plaza, consistency is key. In 2023, Rec Park began activating UN Plaza with table games, skate elements, fitness classes and other activation.



IMPROVED LIGHTING

Especially when days are shorter, tivoli lights have helped add lighting to the plaza and serve as inspiration for more permanent decorative lighting on Leavenworth and other areas of Civic Center.



SEATING

The small daily cluster of tables and chairs in the plaza has been successful due to synergy with the nearby adjacent cafe, which has no internal seating. Customers mix with anyone who wants to take a seat.



GROUND-FLOOR ACTIVATION

Ground floor businesses play an important role in bringing people and activity to UN Plaza. Arsicault Bakery at the Leavenworth Gateway is one example of a business that has generated additional food traffic. (Photo: Yelp, Mike V)

UN Plaza and Fulton Street Activations

In late 2023, the Mayor's Office and the Recreation and Parks Department created a vision for near-term activations, programming and public space improvements within UN Plaza and Fulton Mall designed to increase the vitality of these spaces. This included relocating the Heart of the City Farmers' Market to Fulton Mall, installing skate elements, game tables, adult fitness equipment, green plantings within the Halprin fountain, ground mural within Fulton Mall, and a schedule of programming to complement these changes. These changes have infused new energy and purpose into these spaces and are generally consistent with the ideas advanced by this Public Realm Plan. Like other near-term and pilot projects within the area, the City is hearing from the community and learning what is successful and what needs more work.

The Public Realm Plan supports existing uses and builds in flexibility. The Plan's recommendations support a variety of programming, activation, and public space amenities as needs grow and change over time.









Images: Jim Watkins - Rec Park

Other Neighborhood Efforts Underway

Independent of the Public Realm Plan, other neighborhood initiatives and community-led efforts are also underway, including the following.

Tenderloin Community Action Plan (TCAP)

San Francisco Planning launched the Tenderloin Community Action Plan (TCAP) in 2021 – a community-driven effort that has brought together residents, community organizations, businesses, non-profits, and City agencies to improve quality of life in the neighborhood. In 2022, the City approved an unprecedented $4 million direct investment in the neighborhood to be delivered through a participatory budgeting process. This effort resulted in 21 Community Action Projects; the drafting of an Investment Blueprint - a set of strategic priorities for public and private investment in small business support, youth services, public space improvements and activation, housing, and sustained community capacity.

Golden Gate Green Gateway

A new, public neighborhood green space on the 100 block of Golden Gate Avenue between Leavenworth and Jones Streets. The project includes a daily street closure, greening, art and special events to improve the life of the many people using the block.

Elm Alley School Street

This street closure of Elm Alley between Polk Street and Van Ness Avenue during weekdays is a collaboration between Tenderloin Community School and Friends of Elm Alley. The project has transformed an unsafe alley into a street where kids, their families and the neighborhood at large can play, enjoy art, and gather.

Dodge Alley

Lead by the Tenderloin Community Benefit District (TLCBD), this initiative works with residents and block partners to activate and improve Dodge Place to make it a healthier, more active, and positive community experience for local families and seniors.

Safe Passage

A program lead by the TLCBD that is comprised of a coalition of mothers, youth, seniors, volunteers and service providers who are working to help people feel and be safe while navigating through their neighborhood.



ELM ALLEY SCHOOL STREET

Image: Scott Bravnam, Friends of Elm Alley


GOLDEN GATE GREENWAY

Image: Golden Gate Greenway


DODGE ALLEY ACTIVATIONS

Image: Tenderloin Community Benefit District



SAFE PASSAGE

Image: Tenderloin Community Benefit District


CIVIC CENTER
PUBLIC REALM PLAN






CIVIC CENTER
PUBLIC REALM PLAN