



6|7.09

SPUR

Urbanist

Published monthly
by San Francisco
Planning & Urban
Research Association

THE CITY BUILDERS

THE PROGRESSIVES & CLASSICISTS

THE REGIONALISTS

THE MODERNS

THE CONTEXTUALISTS

THE ECO-URBANISTS

**50
YEARS
OF SPUR
100
YEARS OF
BUILDING
A BETTER
CITY**

SPECIAL ISSUE

Welcome to the Urban Center

On behalf of the SPUR Board of Directors, we would like to extend a warm welcome to all of you — our hard-working members and supporters — to the SPUR Urban Center. Some of you are long-time supporters who have been in the SPUR family for years, even decades, witnesses to the growth and change that have defined both our organization and this great city and region we call home.

Others of you are new members. Perhaps you joined because you value SPUR's unparalleled research in local and regional policy matters and want to support our in-depth policy work. Perhaps you want to learn more from our excellent publications and exhibitions in the Urban Center. Or maybe you're a Young Urbanist, a member of our fastest growing membership group.

However long you've been in the SPUR community — and for whatever reason — the Urban Center is for you. Thank you and welcome. We could not think of a more fitting way to celebrate SPUR's 50th anniversary, and an even longer tradition of citizen involvement in improving San Francisco.



Andy Barnes (top) and Tom Hart are co-chairs of the SPUR Board of Directors.

The opening of the Urban Center is perhaps the biggest change for the organization since the San Francisco Planning and Housing Association — a citizens group founded in 1910 by Alice Griffith, Dr. Langley Porter and others to advocate for decent housing conditions — was reorganized into SPUR in 1959.

That tradition of research and action continues today, almost 100 years since the Association issued its first report on anti-tenement reform, which led to the State Tenement Act of 1911. The Association continued to be an active voice for housing concerns through the next two decades, before they were joined by Telesis — a passionate group of architects and planners who saw better cities as the path toward a better society. In the 1950s, SFHA Director Dorothy Erskine founded Citizens for Regional Recreation and Parks (later renamed People for Open Space, and then Greenbelt Alliance), and started a movement to conserve regional open space by concentrating development in central cities. Led by Aaron Levine, a planning expert from Philadelphia — and initially funded by the Blyth-Zellerbach Committee — the SFHA was re-organized into SPUR, and John Hirten was hired as its first executive director in 1959.

Fast forward 50 years, to the present moment.

We are in a period of what can only be called “heavy lifting.” While the economy of the world is thrashing around us, we are doing our best at SPUR to keep planning and governance in this city and region on track. And if that isn't hard enough, we are also working on the final stages of raising \$4 million more to finish our capital campaign in a soft economy.

That said, we also find ourselves in a time of great opportunity and excitement. On the national level, we are seeing the re-emergence of a strong urban agenda after decades of policies supporting and subsidizing unregulated suburban expansion. Locally and regionally, we have made great progress in sustainable planning (with the recent passage of SB 375, California's anti-sprawl bill) and investing in regional transportation (securing over \$9 billion in the last election for a high-speed rail system and moving forward with planning for the Transbay Terminal). We have also made great strides in local climate change policy, planning for a major earthquake and furthering the smart growth agenda by channeling jobs into downtown employment centers.

Zooming in even further — to SPUR's new headquarters in the Yerba Buena district — we are looking forward to an expansion of the organization's platform for good policy, and an increase in our ability to reach and engage with a broader audience. In the Urban Center, we will continue SPUR's long-time tradition of lunchtime forums. We will also have exhibits, open to SPUR members and the general public, mounted in our new streetfront gallery. Please stop by to explore SPUR's inaugural exhibition, “Agents of Change: Civic Idealism and the Making of San Francisco.” The exhibition — also the focus of this special edition of the Urbanist — covers every major urban planning movement in our city's history. It tells the story of how the San Francisco Bay Area came to be, and frames our current challenges in light of all of the many successes — and failures — of previous generations of urban planners and thinkers.

At SPUR, we believe this knowledge of the past is not just interesting and enlightening — but essential. It enables us to forge ahead with our own agenda by learning from the efforts of those who preceded us. We hope the exhibition answers many questions, but that you leave with many more — and with some inspiration, perhaps, in becoming a present-day ‘agent of change.’ ✨

CELEBRATE OUR CITY



SPUR Urban Center Grand Opening

May 28-30, 2009

**654 Mission Street
San Francisco**

spur.org

Join us for three days of exciting events!

Thursday, May 28: Grand Opening Party for SPUR Members

Friday, May 29: Exhibition Opening and Public Open House

Saturday, May 30: SPUR Community Day

All SPUR members will receive invitations to grand opening events.

All events will take place at the SPUR Urban Center, 654 Mission Street (at Third). All SPUR members will receive invitations by mail and e-mail. **Sign up today at spur.org/join or call 415-781-8726 x116.**



BAY

DISCOVERY

CRUISE

11th Annual Bay Discovery Cruise

Monday
June 8, 2009

spur.org/baycruise

5:30 PM

Cocktails & hors d'oeuvres on the top deck of the *San Francisco Belle*, docked at Pier 3

7:00 PM sharp

All aboard for a dinner cruise along the San Francisco Bay waterfront. See the latest Bay Bridge construction up close!

9:00 PM sharp

All ashore: event concludes

SPONSORSHIPS AVAILABLE

see www.spur.org for more information

Contact events@spur.org or 415-781-8726 x120 to make your reservations.

Purchase your ticket online today at www.spur.org.

Thank you to our generous sponsors *(partial list as of May 15, 2009)*

ADMIRAL



SAN FRANCISCO
WATERFRONT
PARTNERS, LLC



VICE ADMIRAL



COMMODORE

Arup • BCCI Construction • Cox Castle & Nicholson, LLP • David Baker + Partners Architects • Degenkolb Engineers • Emerald Fund, Inc. • Lennar Communities • MPA Design • Nibbi Brothers General Contractors • Port of San Francisco • ROMA Design Group

CAPTAIN

ADCO • Allen Matkins Leck Gamble Mallory & Natsis LLP • AvalonBay Communities, Inc. • Carpenters Union Local 22 • Cassidy, Shimko, Dawson & Kawakami • CirclePoint • CMG Landscape Architecture • Economic and Planning Systems • EDAW | AECOM • Ellis Partners LLC • Environmental Science Associates • FME Architecture + Design • Jacobs • Jean Fraser & Geoff Gordon-Creed • Kenwood Investments, LLC • Linda Jo Fitz • MBH • Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP • PBS&J • Prado Group • rrm design group • Seifel Consulting Inc. • Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton LLP • Universal Paragon Corporation

SKIPPER

Andy & Sara Barnes • Baker Vilar Architects • Jim Chappell • Claudine Cheng • Christiani Johnson Architects • Farella Braun & Martel LLP • Anne Halsted • David & Jane Hartley • Vince and Amanda Hoenigman • Public Financial Management, Inc. • N. Teresa Rea • Bill & Dewey Rosetti

MEDIA SPONSOR

San Francisco Business Times

IN-KIND SPONSORS

BPS Reprographics • EDAW | AECOM • Hornblower Cruises & Events

May 29–November 15, 2009

AGENTS OF CHANGE

CIVIC IDEALISM & THE MAKING OF
SAN FRANCISCO

SPUR URBAN CENTER

654 Mission Street, San Francisco

Using maps, photographs, interviews and an interactive multimedia installation, this major exhibition examines the history of citymaking in San Francisco, and challenges visitors to consider today's urban issues in light of their own values.

The exhibition celebrates the grand opening of the SPUR Urban Center, a place for citizens to come together in conversation about the future. The San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association is a member-supported nonprofit organization. Join our movement for a better city and region!

MORE INFORMATION ONLINE AT SPUR.ORG.

HOURS

TUESDAY

11-8

WED-FRI

11-5

Closed Monday and weekends



The City Builders

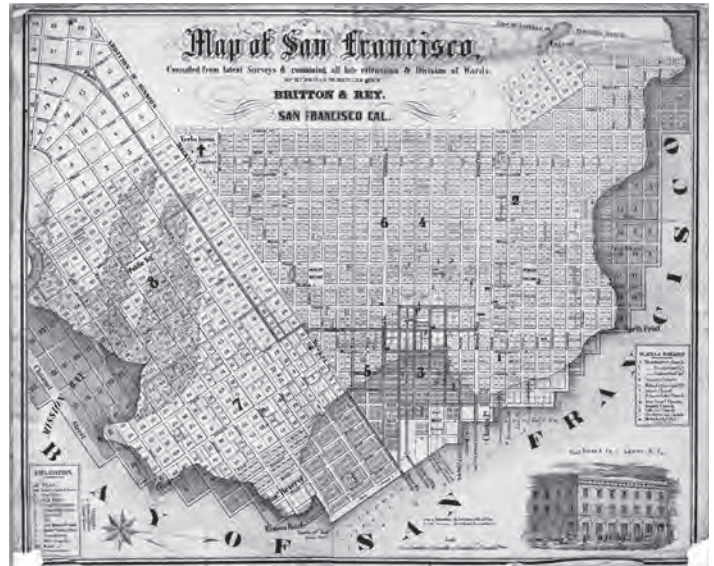
A city built and controlled by private enterprise

San Francisco was a village of 500 people in 1848, just wrested from Mexico and renamed, when news of the gold found at Sutter's Mill reached the East Coast. By 1855, the population had reached 50,000.

Nineteenth-century San Francisco went from a rough-and-tumble boomtown to a Victorian city with cosmopolitan ambitions. Its familiar contours emerged as the arid peninsula's hills were gridded, and its bayshore filled with sand, blasted hilltops and hastily abandoned ships. It matched astounding diversity and relative tolerance with gross inequality and greed, giving rise to an active labor movement marred by spasms of nativist race-baiting and violence.

It was a city built and controlled by private enterprise, and basic services like transit, water and recreation were speculative ventures tied to the city's rapid growth. City government was corrupt and weak, and party bosses doled out patronage in the form of monopoly franchises for essential services. Private streetcar lines were extended into the dunes, opening adjacent land for rapid development, while the Spring Valley Water Company snapped up watersheds all the way to Livermore.

San Francisco's development was driven by a small group of oligarchs who ploughed fortunes made in mining, timber and railroads into a new speculative venture: an urban economy based on manufacturing, finance, trade and urban development. These miners, industrialists, financiers and real estate speculators set out to forge a world-class metropolis in a single generation, enriching themselves in the process. They built the city that would collapse and burn in 1906: an exuberant and frankly ambitious Victorian jumble that was monument to its own explosive growth.



1. The Grid Meets the Hills

The grid that would shape San Francisco's growth was established by Jean-Jacques Vioget's 1839 survey, commissioned by Alcalde Francisco DeHaro to regularize land grants in the new pueblo of Yerba Buena. In keeping with common practice, he established a crude grid of 12 blocks around a central plaza, today's Portsmouth Square. The blocks, which measured 100x150 varas (273x409.5 feet) not only established the street grid, but also the parcelization (into square lots of 50 and 100 varas) that would define building sites and local architecture.

Under American control, the village was renamed San Francisco, and in 1847 Jasper O'Farrell, an Irish engineer, was engaged by mayor Bartlett to extend Vioget's grid and rectify its inaccuracies. The O'Farrell

Plan introduced Market Street, parallel to the Mission Road and a second, larger grid to the south, creating the inconvenient but distinctive intersections that define it today. Most importantly, it established the practice, carried forward in the 1851 Eddy Survey and subsequent additions, of extending the grid without regard to the peninsula's dramatic topography.

The grid was remarkably efficient for both circulation and subdivision, well-suited to absorbing hordes of new arrivals and to the American view of land as a salable commodity, in contrast to the Spanish land-grant model. The grid did have its critics, however, including O'Farrell himself, who proposed accommodations to the topography and was shouted down. Frederick Law Olmsted and Daniel Burnham would both propose in vain that streets

“It made but very little difference that some of the streets which he had laid out followed the lines of a dromedary’s back, or that others described semi-circles some up, some down... up a grade which a goat could not travel.” —M.G. Upton (Journalist)

should follow the contours of the hills. The grid’s hold would be broken only in the 20th century, by romantic residential parks and Modernist superblocks.

2. Shaping the Land: Filling the Bay and Cutting the Hills

San Francisco’s distinctive natural features made it a difficult place to build. Sand dunes extended from the ocean all the way into what is now downtown, while steep hills limited both construction and movement. Although the waterfront is among the world’s best natural harbors, the Bay’s natural edge included broad swaths of beach, mudflat and wetlands separating the water from buildable land. These tidelands—now understood to serve vital ecological functions—were considered wastelands and

the process of filling them gave the city’s waterfront its current contours.

In 1847 and 1853, 450 “tidelands lots,” between Rincon Point and Clark’s Point were auctioned off, raising significant revenue for the new city. As the spaces between the wharves were filled with sand and debris, numerous ships—abandoned by eager 49ers—were buried. North Beach and Mission Bay were gradually filled over the ensuing decades.

The city’s hills presented an even greater challenge as the grid was draped over them, producing streets impassable to horse-drawn wagons. In the 1850s, a maximum street grade of 12 percent was briefly established, but when hills began to be leveled, public outcry produced a more modest solution: a few streets would be graded to ensure access,



William Chapman Ralston

Perhaps more than any other single figure, William “Billy” Ralston, embodied the ambitions and risks of Victorian San Francisco. Confident, brazen and enthusiastic to a fault, he made a fortune in the Comstock Lode through his Bank of California, founded with Darius Ogden Mills. He invested in factories, agriculture, telegraph lines and shipping while his battles over control of the silver mines roiled local stock markets. Eager to fashion a world capital in San Francisco, he spent lavishly on a huge range of projects, including his own headquarters as well as hotels and a theater. His grandest venture — the \$5 million Palace Hotel — would prove his undoing. As his debts mounted, compounded by the Panic of 1873, he made a risky play to buy the Spring Valley Water Company and sell it to the city at a huge profit. When the scheme evaporated in 1875, he was left in deep trouble, which his colleague William Sharon exploited by engineering a run by depositors on the Bank of California. Ruined, Ralston left for his daily swim in the bay, and washed up dead some hours later, while Sharon emerged with most of his assets.

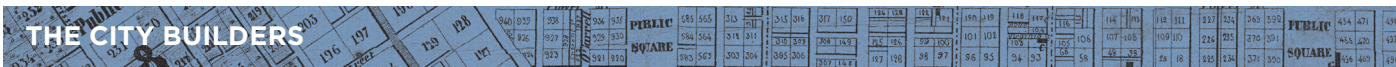
while the steepest would be replaced by stairs, and hilltop parks would be encouraged. In 1869, Rincon Hill, then the city’s most fashionable address, was bisected by the Second Street Cut, intended to facilitate access to the South Beach wharves. At least one house fell into the sandy, unstable 87-foot chasm, and the neighborhood quickly declined. Many of its residents moved to Nob Hill and Russian Hill, easily climbed by brand-new cable cars.

3. The Industrial Oligarchy

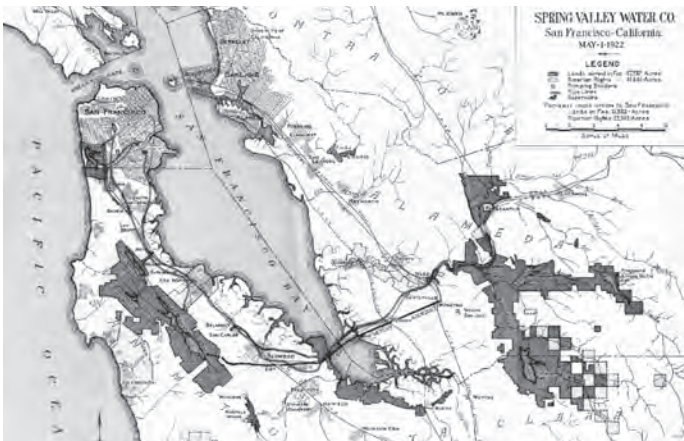
Over four decades, a small group of capitalists ploughed fortunes made in mining and railroads into a new speculative venture: the building of San Francisco and a new economy based on manufacturing, finance, trade and urban development. They built and ran private streetcar networks that opened their landholdings to development. They invested in Potrero Point factories and the Spring Valley Water Company. They shaped the political landscape by publishing newspapers like the *Call* or the *Chronicle*, bribing officials, or running for office themselves. They built an exclusive social world around their Nob Hill mansions, Belmont Estates and the Pacific Union Club.

The free-for-all of Victorian capitalism favored individuals who could gain control of many different elements of the economy, and a few had staggering reach. They included the so-called “Big Four”—Leland Stanford, Collis Huntington, Mark Hopkins and Charles Crocker, who built the Central Pacific Transcontinental Railroad, later consolidated into the Southern Pacific, which controlled streetcar and steamship lines.





There were California millionaires who had grown rich merely by lucky speculation. They displayed their wealth with a vulgar and unbecoming ostentation. They did not, as rich men nearly always do in the Atlantic States, bestow a large part of it on useful public objects. There was therefore nothing to break the wave of suspicious dislike. —Viscount Bryce, 1889



While hardly a monolithic block—many had competing interests and some were sworn enemies—they were a remarkably small and insular group, and shared the sensibility of ambitious frontiersmen who built their fortunes and their city on ruthless opportunism.

Potrero Point

By the 1860s, industrial enterprises moved from North Beach and SOMA, blasting away the steep serpentine of Potrero Point, and using the fill to create the flat, buildable land along its deep-water bayshore. Large-scale manufacturing at Potrero Point (now Pier 70) employed thousands, becoming the industrial engine of San

Francisco as its economy shifted from the Comstock mines to the Pacific Rim.

The Pacific Rolling Mills and Union Iron Works created a state-of-the-art shipbuilding facility, alongside Donahue's gasworks (the basis of PG&E) and Claus Spreckels' massive sugar refinery. San Francisco's future lay in Pacific trade and conquest, and Potrero Point built the sugar ships and gunboats that drove U.S. expansion into Hawaii and the Philippines. In the 20th Century, Union Iron Works was purchased by Bethlehem Steel, producing numerous ships through both world wars and BART's transbay tube in the 1960s.



4. The Speculative Metropolis: Transit, Water and Land Streetcars and Growth

In San Francisco as elsewhere, urban development was driven by mass transit, which in the 19th century was provided entirely by private companies, which profited from operating streetcars, from the recreational destinations they often served, and, above all, from the development of new neighborhoods on land “opened” by transit access.

By 1851, a private omnibus coach line connected downtown wharves to the Mission via a plank road (now Mission Street) and others soon followed. In 1860, the first horse-drawn railcar line opened into the property of Thomas Hayes (now the inner Mission and Hayes Valley) setting off a flurry of new rail development throughout the city by the 1870s. New tracts of residential development quickly followed. The hills remained exclusive enclaves, out of reach to transit until 1873, when Andrew Hallidie, a Scottish mining engineer, invented the cable car. In short order, even the steepest hills became passable, creating a boom in view lots.

The boom in streetcars and land development drew the interest of San Francisco's powerful oligarchs, flush from the Comstock mines and the transcontinental railroad. In the 1880s Southern Pacific, led by Leland Stanford, began acquiring streetcar companies. SP

consolidated these into a near-monopoly, the Market Street Railway, in 1893, which was eventually purchased in 1902 by the United Railroads. The graft and labor unrest associated with these companies would drive the municipalization of transit in the Progressive Era.



The Spring Valley Water Company

As soon as San Francisco began to grow, water became a problem. The handful of creeks within city limits were entirely inadequate to serve a large city. Founded in 1858 by George Ensign, and granted the authority to condemn lands for a water system, the Spring Valley Water Company quickly became a powerful and hated monopoly, whose shareholders would include financiers like William Ralston, William Sharon, Lloyd Tevis and William Bourn.

The Company played a key role in the conversion of the dunescape of the Outside Lands into Golden Gate Park, for which it was obliged to provide free water. Under Hermann Schussler, a hydraulic engineer who had made his name in the Sierra mines, the Spring Valley Water Company gradually acquired more than

100,000 acres of watershed, first in San Mateo County (where the Crystal Springs and San Andreas Reservoirs remain) and later into the South Bay and Livermore Valley, from which water was delivered to the city by aqueduct. Repeated attempts to municipalize the company faltered over the price until 1930.

The city's rapid growth required a larger and more consistent source of water: the Hetch Hetchy system, financed by public bonds.

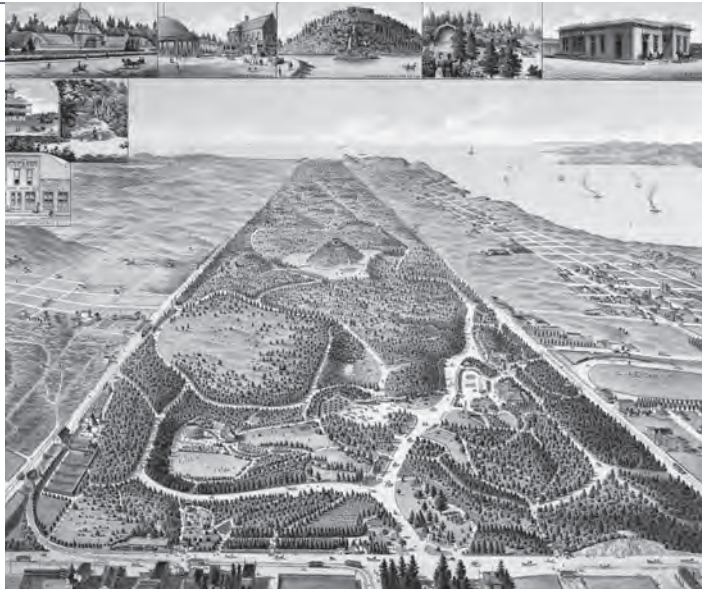


Immigration and Labor: The Eight-Hour Day

Workers in San Francisco began organizing in the early 1850s, and the city has been strongly associated with union labor ever since. Its relative isolation favored workers, who campaigned successfully for an eight-hour workday in the 1860s. Eight Hour Leagues spread the practice through the trades, and won a statewide eight-hour workday in 1868.

The victory, celebrated in spectacular parades, would prove brief, however. The completion of the Transcontinental Railroad the following year brought a flood of workers just as the economy was sagging, and the eight-hour law fell by the wayside.

Many of those workers were Chinese railroad laborers, who ended up in San Francisco

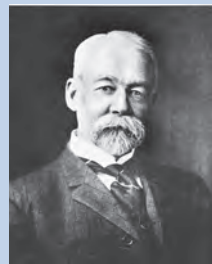


Golden Gate Park

Golden Gate Park was one of the few grand civic gestures of 19th Century San Francisco. New York City's Central Park, designed in 1857 by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, had recently set the template for the large urban park as romantic landscape. When Olmsted visited Berkeley in 1865, San Francisco hired him to make recommendations for a major open space, the lack of which many boosters saw as a major deficit.

But rather than replicate Central Park, Olmsted suggested an approach rooted in the challenging local climate: a series of smaller parks from what is now Aquatic Park to Duboce Park, connected by a sunken promenade that offering shelter from the prevailing winds.

Olmsted's plan was rejected in favor of 1,013 acres of dunes in the Outside Lands, where the city had just won title after a struggle



with the federal government. Working from East to West, Hall devised a brilliant process of ecological succession, using barley and lupine to stabilize the dunes, after which generous infusions of manure, topsoil, and water (provided under duress by the Spring Valley Water Company) yielded some semblance of the pastoral English landscape the citizens craved.

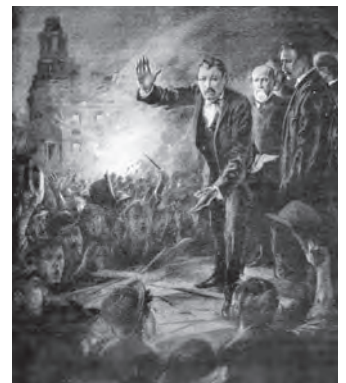
factories at low wages, and became the victims of racist scapegoating by labor demagogues like Dennis Kearny, who led the Workingmen's Party after 1877 with the slogan "The Chinese Must Go!". Angry mobs attacked Chinese businesses and speakers railed against the capitalists, especially the Central Pacific, who hired them.

At the turn of the century, labor was again at the center of San Francisco politics, as Mayor Phelan cracked down on striking dockworkers in 1901, propelling Abe Ruef and the Union Labor Party into power. Angry strikes against the United Railroads streetcar company continued, building momentum for a Municipal Railroad and a Progressive resurgence.

The Chinese Experience

Chinese immigrants first came to California in the 1850s to work in mining and later railroad construction. With the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869, increasing numbers of Chinese sought work in San Francisco, and the population of Chinatown swelled to more 30,000, at very high densities of 2-300 people per acre. It was a city apart, with its own language, customs and informal government—the "Six Companies" of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Society. Ninety percent of the population was male, and prostitution, gambling and opium parlors served both locals and visitors.

In 1882, the U.S. Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, severely restricting Chinese immigration, and Chinatown's population began to shrink. With Chinese excluded from most of the city, Chinatown remained extremely dense. Public health concerns—some spurious and racist—drove repeated efforts to displace the Chinese. In 1886, laundry owner Yick Wo challenged a law aimed at banning Chinese laundries on equal protection grounds and won, setting an important precedent on racialized zoning.



The Progressives and Classicists

Reforming government and reimagining the city

The turn of the 20th century saw a series of reform movements in reaction to the greed and corruption of 19th century San Francisco. The bald graft and bare-knuckled politics of the Victorian city were abhorrent to the generation that followed, who found the accompanying social ills and labor strife both threatening and morally offensive.

They responded with campaigns to clean up and professionalize city government, municipalize public services, and tackle poverty, disease and other social problems. Social reformers targeted conditions in poor communities through settlement houses and public health campaigns. Many were educated, idealistic children of the Gilded Age, challenging political machines rooted in immigrant and labor groups, and they precipitated a protracted political struggle with overtones of culture and class. But city government's new transparency and new capacity to deliver basic services, from the Municipal Railroad to the Hetch Hetchy water system, ultimately served all segments of society better and came to define expectations.

Others had aesthetic ambitions, and put forward grand schemes to remake San Francisco's businesslike jumble as a splendid Beaux Arts capital worthy of the European models they idealized. Daniel Burnham's bold 1906 plan neatly coincided with the tragic earthquake and fire. Though the Burnham Plan was sidelined in the rush to rebuild, elements of the City Beautiful appeared at U.C. Berkeley, the Civic Center, and the Panama Pacific International Exhibition.

1. Civic Reform The Progressives' Bumpy Rise: Phelan, Ruef, and the Graft Trials

The first decade of the new century saw a protracted political struggle between the Progressives and the new Union



Labor Party, created by Boss Abe Ruef, who put forward musician Eugene Schmitz to run for mayor, after Phelan alienated organized labor by cracking down on striking streetcar operators. Ruef was a notoriously corrupt political boss, whose machine continued the kind of graft-based politics of the last century.

Progressivism was a complex and contradictory movement.

Its social reformers took on poverty and social ills from a position of privilege, and strove to "better" the poor through assimilation. Government reform efforts were often geared toward improving the business climate and breaking the hold of corrupt political machines on City Hall. Its relationship with organized labor teetered from coalition-building to schism to and back again. There is little doubt, however, that they put forward a new vision of how cities should operate: competently, transparently and in the service of stability and prosperity.

After the earthquake, Phelan and his allies initiated trials of Ruef and Schmitz on charges of graft, inducing many members of the machine to testify. Both were convicted (though Schmitz was acquitted on appeal) and Ruef spent time at San Quentin. Although the era of open graft was over, it would take the Progressive until 1912 to take back City Hall.

The City Charter of 1898

returned home rule to San Francisco after four decades beholden to the State Legislature. It reorganized city government

“Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably will themselves not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will not die.” —Daniel Burnham

New Institutions: City Agencies, Philanthropic Foundations and Corporations

Many arenas of public life were institutionalized and structured to shift power away from individuals and toward independent bodies. The commissions and civil-service agencies of City government were designed in the period to separate technical professionals from political pressures.

Similar arrangements changed the nature of business, as both government and internal pressure produced a shift away from the massive trusts and family empires of the Gilded Age, and toward corporate governance that divided power among managers, boards, labor and public shareholders.

Philanthropy was also institutionalized in this period, as the families of 19th-Century capitalists—Haas, Goldman, Fleishacker, Stanford and others—created the foundations with boards, bylaws and endowments, that would underwrite the Bay Area's nonprofit arts, social service and conservation movements over the coming century.

along the civil-service and commission model designed to reduce political corruption and increase competence and transparency. It also called for the municipalization of public services like water and transit. Under the new Charter, San Francisco rapidly recovered from the earthquake, and built Muni, the Hetch Hetchy water system, Civic Center and the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. In contrast, the previous City Hall took 20 years to build, and became a symbol of shoddy construction and graft before collapsing in 1906.

2. The Earthquake and Its Aftermath

On April 18th, 1906, the political tug-of-war was interrupted, if only briefly, by the earthquake and fire that obliterated much of San Francisco. Twenty-eight thousand buildings were destroyed and more than 3,000 people killed, while a quarter million people were rendered homeless.

In the aftermath, Burnham rushed to San Francisco, convinced that a golden opportunity was at hand to implement his plan. Although it was considered, expeditious

rebuilding won out over civic beautification and the expense and delay entailed in assembling private property for new streets and parks. Many simply began rebuilding immediately, and the Burnham Plan quickly faded.

Attempts were made to relocate Chinatown to Hunter's Point and "reclaim" the area for white business. The Chinese community was quick to respond, finding common cause with white landlords who thrived on the neighborhood's density. They called on the Chinese Embassy, who threatened Governor Pardee with a trade embargo, and they enlisted (mostly white) architects to develop the "oriental" vocabulary of upturned eaves, upper-story loggias, and pagoda-inspired turrets that would appeal to visitors and tourists.



The San Francisco Housing Association and the roots of SPUR

In the aftermath of the earthquake, a rash of unregulated building was producing substandard tenement housing. In 1910, Alice Griffith, who had founded San Francisco's first Settlement House, the Telegraph Hill Dwellers' Association, and Langley Porter, a physician, created the San Francisco



James Duvall Phelan

Few figures embody the Progressive Movement in San Francisco—and its contradictions—as completely as James Duvall Phelan. A prosperous and scholarly Irish Immigrant, he had the support of both labor and the wealthy when he was elected mayor in 1896, but could also be elitist and racist. He was passionate about both reforming city government and civic beautification, which he viewed as essential to SFs fulfilling its promise as the Paris of the West.

He led the effort that resulted in the City Charter of 1900, but lost to Eugene Schmitz in 1902 after alienating striking workers with a police crackdown. In 1904, he founded and led the Association for the Improvement and Adornment of San Francisco,



to "promote in every practical way the beautifying of the streets, public buildings, parks, squares, and places of SF" Most importantly, this meant engaging Daniel Burnham to develop a long-term plan for the city, which was delivered just before the earthquake.

Phelan also served on the Committee of Fifty that led reconstruction efforts and instigated the investigations that led to the graft trials of Schmitz and Abe Ruef. He went on to state politics without seeing his grandest plans realized, but his idealism and civic vision were profoundly influential.

Housing Association to educate the public about the need for housing regulations and to lobby Sacramento for anti-tenement legislation. The result, following a hard-hitting report by the Association, was the State Tenement House Act of 1911, which created basic standards for health and safety in housing construction.

The SFHA continued to advocate for housing reform through the 1930s, becoming the San Francisco Planning and Housing Association in 1941, and the San Francisco Housing and Urban Renewal Association in 1959. The SFHA's model of citizen-driven research and advocacy continues to inform SPUR's work today. SPUR's good government program area, including fiscal reporting reform, the creation of the Mayor's Fiscal Advisory Committee, Charter reform in 1994 and its highly-regarded ballot analysis, as well as its research reports on the full range of city issues, can be traced directly to Progressive-era reformers like the SFHA.

3. Progressive Public Works The Municipal Railroad

By 1902, San Francisco's competing streetcar companies had consolidated into a near-monopoly, the United Railroads, widely hated for its corruption and anti-labor policies. The City Charter of 1900 called for municipalized services, and a public railroad took priority.

In 1912 the City acquired the Geary cable lines, whose private charter had expired. Newly-elected Mayor "Sunny" Jim Rolph opened the system, and its rapid expansion was a popular centerpiece of his 19 years in office. In 1914, Muni added an additional pair of streetcar tracks to Market Street, challenging United Railroads.

Muni became an enormous source of pride, developing new lines to serve the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition and, in 1917, constructing the twin peaks tunnel that opened the city's west side to development.



Michael O'Shaughnessy

Michael O'Shaughnessy, who served as the City Engineer under Mayor Rolph, embodied the Progressives' ambitions for a technocratic civil service, free from political and speculative influence. Born in Ireland, he had established a successful engineering practice, which he left in 1912, taking half his former pay. With the help of the new City Charter, he oversaw a massive public works campaign, funded by bonds, taxes and assessments, that was intended both to provide efficient public services and to shape the development of the city.

He dramatically expanded the nascent Muni system, quickly providing new lines to serve the Panama Pacific International Exposition in 1915, followed by the J, K, L and M lines that are still in operation. He oversaw construction of the Stockton and Twin Peaks tunnels, the latter a 10,000-foot technical marvel that enabled the development of the southwestern part of the city. His most dramatic achievement, however, was the construction of the city's municipal water system, which brought Sierra water to the city through a 167-mile system of dams, pipelines and aqueducts from the Hetch Hetchy Valley. He died days before its completion.

4. The Aesthetic Impulse: City Beautiful and the Beaux Arts

While some pursued political and social reforms, other saw civic beautification as the key to a better city. Many San Francisco elites were well traveled, and looked to Europe—and the neoclassical order of the beaux-arts style—for an antidote to the city's decorative jumble. The hugely successful 1893 World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago, designed by Daniel Burnham, exposed many Americans to the monumental formalism of the City Beautiful, and to the potential impact of a World's Fair. The 1894 Midwinter Exposition in Golden Gate park actually repurposed some of its buildings, in addition to constructing the DeYoung Museum and Japanese Tea Garden.



The aesthetic ambitions of this generation were personified by Phoebe Apperson Hearst, who was inspired by her travels in Europe and exasperated with the provincial aesthetics of San Francisco. In 1896, she launched an architectural competition for the U.C. Berkeley campus, which she advertised in



“San Francisco is more fascinating than beautiful, a site of flagrantly missed opportunities.” —Willis Polk, A. Page Brown and Bernard Maybeck



The 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition

A World's Fair had been proposed for San Francisco well before the earthquake, and the idea returned as a way to celebrate the city's rapid reconstruction as well as the opening of the Panama Canal, which promised to cement San Francisco's emerging position as an imperial capital on the Pacific Rim.

After some wrangling, 635 acres of Harbor View (now the Marina) and the Presidio were selected, and Edward Bennett, who had been Burnham's assistant, supervised the design. The centerpiece was the Tower of Jewels, which soared over a series of garden courts framed by ornate but temporary exposition buildings, washed at night by elaborate electrical lighting. The only piece that remains today is Bernard Maybeck's Palace of Fine Arts, rebuilt in the 1960s. The new Muni lines had been rushed into service, and the new Civic Center, built that same year, amplified the San Francisco's pride at this defining event.

European circles. Emile Benard's winning scheme emphasized formal axes and quadrangles, framed by ensembles of classically inspired buildings. The plan would be carried forward by John Galen Howard, and typifies the aesthetic ideals of the period.

The Civic Center

The new Civic Center, constructed between 1913 and 1915, is one of the most complete expressions of the City Beautiful (and the only major piece of Burnham's Plan) built in San Francisco. Bakewell



and Brown's City Hall dome terminates the formal axis that runs from Market Street, and the surrounding ensemble of neoclassical civic buildings (including the Civic Auditorium, built to house conventions during the PPIE) embody a symmetrical frame to the park.

5. Residential Parks and Garden Suburbs

San Francisco's grid had been criticized from the beginning as relentless and unresponsive to the city's topography, but had nevertheless been extended for reasons of commercial and technical expediency. By the turn of the century, the fashion in residential neighborhoods had turned to romantic, curvilinear street plans that followed the contours of the land. Several East Bay and Peninsula districts had been built along these lines, and the Burnham Plan proposed this approach for San Francisco hilltops.

The grid was finally broken in the southwest part of the city, with the development of several so-called "residential parks", including St. Francis Wood, Forest Hills and Ingleside Terrace. Designed for affluent streetcar commuters, these single-use tracts of Beaux Arts and craftsman houses flourished after the opening Twin Peaks tunnel opened in 1918.



“Sunny Jim” Rolph

Although Phelan was the high-minded purist behind the Progressive ascendancy, it was James Rolph who implemented many of its successful programs. A likeable man and a savvy politician, he was equally at home drinking with working men, launching public works, and schmoozing with the business elite. He was mayor from 1912 to 1931 and presided over the creation of Muni, the PPIE, Civic Center, and the construction of much of the Hetch Hetchy water system.

The Regionalists

Grappling with growth in the Bay Area

In the 1940s and 50s, planners, citizens and business leaders began to view the metropolitan region as a critical scale for both planning and conservation. Wartime industry and postwar suburbanization, abetted by bridges and highways, drove regional expansion and created regional problems, like traffic, smog and the loss of agricultural land.

The nine counties that touch the Bay have 101 municipalities, each with local land use authority, and often in competition with one another. Many important dynamics operate across arbitrary municipal boundaries: job and housing markets, travel behavior, air quality, recreational amenities, habitats, watersheds and ecological processes, even identity and culture.

Planning intellectuals began focusing on regionalism in the 1920s, hoping to manage growth and preserve the relationship of city and country. Citizen advocates, galvanized by rapid bay fill and the loss of open space, organized conservation efforts that spawned the Bay Conservation and Development Commission and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Planning for BART began in 1951 and came to fruition in the early 1970s.

But in spite a looming climate crisis, repeated efforts to manage regional growth and its consequences have fallen short of a workable framework, and regional planning is conducted by a patchwork of single-purpose agencies.

1. Early Efforts The Greater San Francisco Movement

Efforts at regional consolidation have a long history here. As early as 1907, the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce created the Greater San Francisco Association, which aimed to replicate New York City's recent annexation of Brooklyn. Among other motivations, expanded bonding power would make the critical Hetch Hetchy water system feasible. But Oakland, flush with earthquake refugees and new industrial development, was having none of it (the name least of all). The East Bay was the terminus of inland rail routes, had mild weather and room to grow, and wasn't about to become a vassal of its charred, frigid neighbor to the West.

A 1912 state ballot initiative

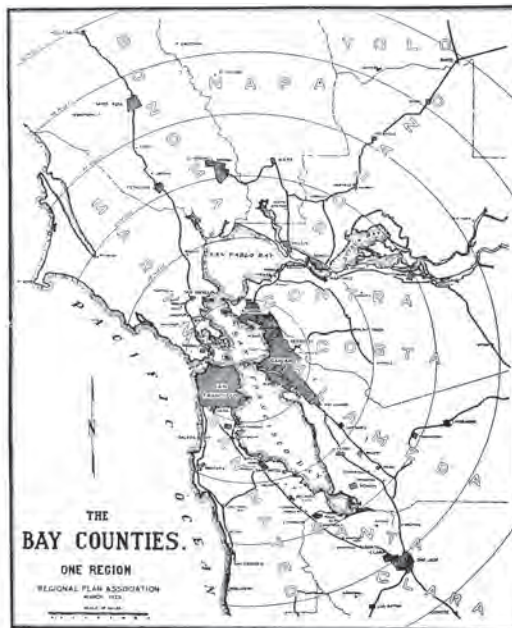
on consolidation was roundly defeated. Projects of regional concern would henceforth need to be undertaken by voluntary single-purpose metropolitan districts.

The idea of regional planning emerged in earnest in the 1920s, when the Commonwealth Club, inspired by efforts in New York and Los Angeles, launched what would become the San Francisco Regional Plan Association. Led by earnest, patrician Frederick Dohrmann, Jr, the SFRPA presciently identified the emerging region's critical needs, from transit to bridges, airports and open space, but was ahead of its time and failed to resonate broadly.

2. A Region Emerges: Streetcars, Ferries, and Bridges

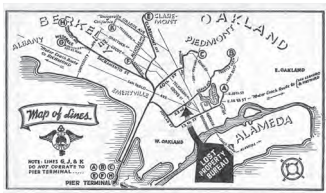
By the turn of the 20th century, the Bay Area was beginning to function as an interdependent region. Wealthy San Franciscans had long held country estates on the Peninsula, where upscale suburbs grew around the Southern Pacific rail line (now Caltrain). Rail lines were complemented by state highways, many based on bicycling routes, after a 1909 bond measure. These became the basis of many major arterial roads once supplanted by mid-century freeways.

The East Bay took shape around the Oakland terminus of the Transcontinental Railroad, the University of California in





Berkeley and industrial development in Richmond. But two factors led to a major development boom: streetcar transit and the thousands of earthquake



refugees who arrived in 1906. Francis “Borax” Smith used his mining fortune to acquire large tracts of land in the East Bay, where his “Realty Syndicate” developed housing and streetcars in tandem, as well as the Claremont Hotel and Key Route Inn. The Key System, as the streetcars became known, delivered commuters to a ferry pier in Emeryville for the quick trip to the San Francisco Ferry Building. By the mid-1920s, commuters on the Key System and other lines were making 35 million transbay ferry trips per year.

As impressive as the ferry commute was, it was the bridges that finally made the Bay Area a single, integrated region. Imagined and studied for decades, The Bay Bridge (1936) and Golden Gate Bridge (1937) were engineering marvels and sources of immense pride, completed at the height of the

Depression. In 1939, the Golden Gate International Exposition was held on newly-constructed Treasure Island, celebrating the region’s integration at its symbolic heart.

The Bay Bridge more than doubled the transbay commute, and though it brought Key System streetcars directly into the newly constructed Transbay Terminal, the tracks were removed in 1958 in an attempt to move more vehicles over the congested span.

3. The Idea of Regional Planning

The idea of regional planning had been emerging in intellectual and policy circles for decades. The British regionalism of Patrick Geddes and Ebenezer Howard found American advocates such as Lewis Mumford, co-founder of the Regional Plan Association of America. Responding to the explosive growth of industrial cities, they imagined a healthy, mutually supportive (and sometimes idealized) relationship between

Jack Kent



Jack Kent was among the most influential Bay Area city planners, and was connected with nearly every facet of Bay Area regionalism. While studying architecture at U.C. Berkeley in the 1930s, he was inspired by Lewis Mumford’s ideas on regionalism, which resonated with what he saw in the Bay Area. Traveling in Europe, he encountered both modern architecture and regionalism, visiting Ebenezer Howard’s garden city at Wellwyn. Back in the Bay Area, he worked at the National Resources Planning board, a New Deal agency that espoused regional planning. He was a member of Telesis, where he collaborated with the SFPHA (now SPUR) to promote planning in San Francisco, where, at age 29, he served as the second planning director.

Kent also served on the Planning Director’s Committee, which advised the newly-formed Bay Area Council on regional planning matters, including the need for regional transit. In 1948, he was invited to create U.C. Berkeley’s Department of City and Regional Planning, where he published the classic text, “The Urban General Plan” in 1964.

cities and their agricultural and ecological hinterlands, and sought mechanisms to realize it.

These ideas influenced, at least on paper, New Deal programs like the National Resources Planning Council and the Tennessee Valley Authority, as well as Telesis, the influential Bay Area planning group. Telesis, concerned that the livability of the Bay Area was being eroded by sprawl, sponsored exhibitions in 1940 (Space for Living) and 1950 (The Next Million People) promoting comprehensive “environmental design” to rationalize Bay Area development.

During World War II, efforts to organize wartime industrial location, housing and transportation led to quasi-governmental planning entities. After the war, many of these major industrial employers formed the Bay Area Council, to advocate for regional industrial development and infrastructure, including BART.



4. A Giant Leap for the Region: BART

Rapid postwar suburbanization produced traffic congestion, smog, and the threat of declining center cities. Civic and business groups like the Bay Area Council and SPUR (then SFPHA) began advocating regional transit both to organize regional growth and to reinforce the emerging service-based economies of San

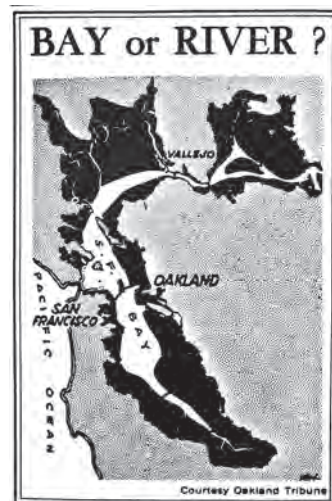


Francisco and Oakland. In 1951, the State Legislature created a study commission on regional transit, finding that, "If the Bay Area is to be preserved as a fine place to live and work, a regional rapid transit system is essential to prevent total dependence on automobiles and freeways..."

It also stated that any transit system needed to be coordinated with a total plan for the region's development, but lacked any provisions for regional land use controls. The five-county Bay Area Rapid Transit District was created in 1957, and empowered to raise funds through tolls and taxes. In 1962, San Mateo County supervisors pulled out of the plan. Marin County, unable to bear an increased share of costs, followed suit. Voters approved a revised three-county plan by a hair's breadth in 1962. Construction began in 1964, and costs ballooned from \$996 million to \$1.6 billion by the time the system was complete. But the 71.5 mile system, serving 33 stations in 17 cities, was the first major U.S. transit system constructed after World War II. The spacious, carpeted cars and futuristic trains and stations were intended to lure transit-wary Californians out of their cars.

5. Saving the Bay

From 1959 to 1961 Citizens for Regional Recreation and Parks, just founded (along with SPUR) by Dorothy Erskine, sponsored annual conferences through the U.C. Extension on the state and potential of the San Francisco Bay for recreation. In conducting related research, Berkeley planning professor Mel Scott determined that about one-third of the Bay's 736 square miles had already been filled, and an Army Corps of Engineers Study showed that much of the remainder might be filled before long. The Army Corps maps became the basis of the iconic "Bay or River?" graphic that



spurred the Bay conservation movement.

The successful preservation of the Bay can be largely attributed to three remarkable Berkeley women: Kay Kerr, Esther Gulick and Sylvia McLaughlin, who became aware of the Bay fill issue when Berkeley was planning a major expansion into the water. They organized Save San Francisco Bay, launching a formidable grassroots campaign that reached thousands and drawing on their political connections (all three were married to powerful U.C. academics and administrators) to reach and enlist State Senator Eugene MacAteer. In 1964, MacAteer tapped SPUR Deputy Director Joe Bodovitz to head a study commission on the issue. The result was the 1965 MacAteer Petris Act, which placed a moratorium on Bay fill and created the Bay Conservation and Development Commission, with Bodovitz as its director.

6. Regional Open Space Conservation

The Golden Gate National Recreation Area: A Citizen Triumph

The Golden National Recreation Area, 75,000 acres of stunning headlands and coast range wildlands, is one of the nation's great urban conservation areas, protecting some of the region's defining elements. But although our regional greenbelt is at the core of the Bay Area's identity, its conservation was the result of a concerted—and recent—citizen campaign. As geopolitics made local defenses obsolete, local military lands came under development

pressure, and SPUR had been involved in struggles to preserve Fort Mason, Alcatraz and the Presidio, despite these areas having been identified for eventual park use.

Amy Meyer, an east coast transplant living in the outer sunset became involved in open space conservation when, at a SPUR neighborhood-services meeting, she became aware of a National Archives warehouse proposed for East Fort Miley,



near Land's End. She quickly connected with the Sierra Club and SPUR, and formed People for a Golden Gate national Recreation Area. Amy and PFGGNRA launched a campaign, hosted and mentored by



“I prefer to think of the waters of the San Francisco Bay as uniting the various communities rather than dividing them, and on that account I consider that their common problems demand a common solution.” — Fred Dohrmann, Jr. (President of the Regional Plan Association)

SPUR, that drew in more than 65 organizations and hundreds of volunteers, with the goal of establishing federal protection for 4,000 acres of the most threatened land. In two short years, a flurry of organizing, letter-writing, and advertising created enough momentum to earn the backing of elected officials like Senator Phil Burton, and even President Nixon, whose campaign photo-op on a San Francisco pier led to a Senate hearing for the GGNRA proposal, by then encompassing 34,000 acres as far as the Olema Valley. In October of 1972, the GGNRA became law, and has since grown to 75,000 acres—part of a 175,000 acre greenbelt of protected land at San Francisco’s doorstep.

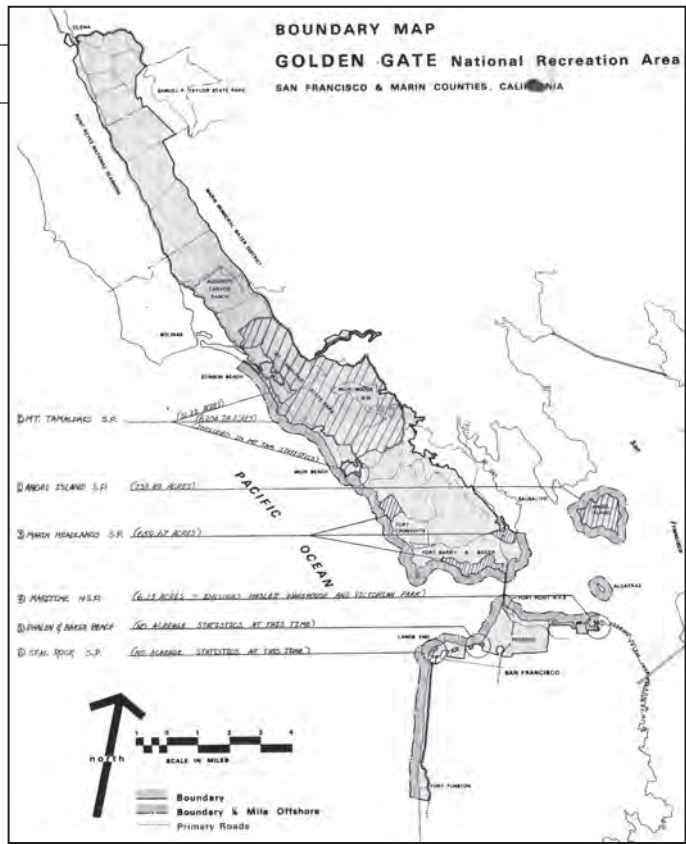


- Conservation Organizations founded in the Bay Area**
- > Trust for Public Land
 - > Friends of the Earth
 - > The Sierra Club
 - > Earth Island Institute
 - > People for Open Space/Greenbelt Alliance
 - > Transportation And Land Use Coalition/TransAct
 - > Natural Resources Defense Council
 - > Urban Habitat
 - > Goldman Environmental Prize/Goldman Fund

7. Regional Planning and Governance: A Bumpy Ride

In spite of the longstanding recognition of regional problems, there is no public agency empowered to conduct regional planning in the Bay Area. On at least 11 separate occasions, attempts to create some form of limited-purpose regional government have failed. Local interests are loathe to cede any authority to a broader agency, a position that finds legal backing in the State Constitution’s “home rule” doctrine.

Successful campaigns by citizens, political leaders, civic and business organizations have resulted in single-purpose agencies dealing with air, water, open



space and transportation at the regional scale. The Association of Bay Area Governments was created in 1961 as a voluntary council of governments charged with regional planning. Although it produced an influential Regional Plan in 1970, with ambitious conservation goals and a focus on concentrating growth in existing cores, it lacks the authority to regulate land use, and the plan remains a path not taken. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission, created by the State Legislature in 1968, is the region’s Congestion Management Agency, is charged with apportioning Federal and State Transportation funds, but not land use planning. In 1971, a bill to combine the two into a single agency failed by one vote. In the late 1980s, a renewed effort, Bay Vision 20/20, conducted an extensive effort to build a regional planning framework, but the resulting legislation failed in 1992.

Meanwhile, the region has expanded well beyond the Bay Area’s nine counties and into the Central Valley, further complicating attempts to fashion a regional planning framework. Between 1980 and 2000, the number of commuters from 12 neighboring counties into the Bay Area nine-county core nearly quadrupled. Region-wide, new commutes are overwhelmingly by auto, far outweighing the growth in transit ridership.

The emergence of global climate change as major policy focus has renewed efforts to address regional growth patterns, which remain uncoordinated and overwhelmingly auto-dependent. The State’s new climate change and anti-sprawl legislation (AB 32 and SB 375 respectively) create new regional requirements and planning tools. Among other things, SB 375 links transportation dollars to regional land use planning. Its impact remains to be seen.

The Moderns

Destroying the city in order to save it

By the end of World War II, American cities, including San Francisco, were suffering. Fifteen years of Depression and war left a serious housing shortage and overcrowded, dilapidated conditions in many areas. Automobiles brought traffic, pollution and accidents to city streets, and the booming suburbs drew families, jobs and investment out of central cities.

But the experts, or so it seemed, could meet any challenge. Planners, including the Telesis group and the San Francisco Planning and Housing Association (later SPUR) had been imagining a modern, rationalized Bay Area since the late 1930s. Driven by socially and environmentally progressive impulses, they saw bold planning as the imperative that could save the city. Housing advocates won federal support for public housing, early examples of which were innovative, livable and well-made. They looked to modern architecture and social housing in Europe, and imagined clearing away the decrepit tenements of the industrial city to create a new city of light, air and open space.

But the approach—wholesale demolition and re-development—produced one of the most traumatic and divisive chapters in San Francisco’s history. It began as a grand coalition of government, business, labor and housing advocates, striving to “save the city”. But over time, both local projects and federal incentives began to look less like social reform in the public interest, and more like commercial real estate ventures at the expense of local communities.



1. Housers and the New Deal

The reforms of the Progressive Era helped create a sense that social problems could be addressed through regulation, public action and citizen advocacy, backed up by rigorous research in the social sciences. It was against this backdrop that the Great Depression hit, and Roosevelt’s New Deal turned expertise and idealism to the

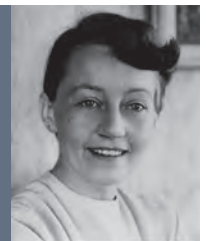
service of social improvement. Housing was a particularly pressing need, and young advocates like Catherine Bauer and Dorothy Erskine began connecting disparate strands to create a distinctly modern approach to urban housing. They took in Progressive Era tenement reform, social science research and innovative social housing experiments by modern architects in Europe, and forged the policies that would shape postwar American cities.

These “housers,” including the San Francisco Housing Association, were especially outraged by industrial slums, in which poor renters were exploited economically and subjected to overcrowding, disease and pollution. “Slum clearance”—the total demolition of ‘blighted’ districts seemed to be the only solution, and became a progressive byword.

Catherine Bauer

Catherine Bauer Wurster was among the most passionate and influential advocates of social housing in the United States. While traveling, she was exposed to European Modernist experiments with progressive housing and became increasingly convinced of the potential of good design and planning to address human problems. In New York, she had a romantic and intellectual relationship with critic Lewis Mumford, and in 1934, she published *Modern Housing*, a classic text on progressive housing for low-income people.

Working with the Labor Housing Conference during the Depression, she was a passionate advocate of public housing, and was invited to co-author the 1937 Wagner-Steagall Housing Act, which initiated significant federal investment in public housing and slum clearance. In the late 1930s, she married the architect William Wurster and moved to the Bay Area, where she was a member of Telesis. She died in a hiking accident in 1964.



and boldly determined to reorder the world.

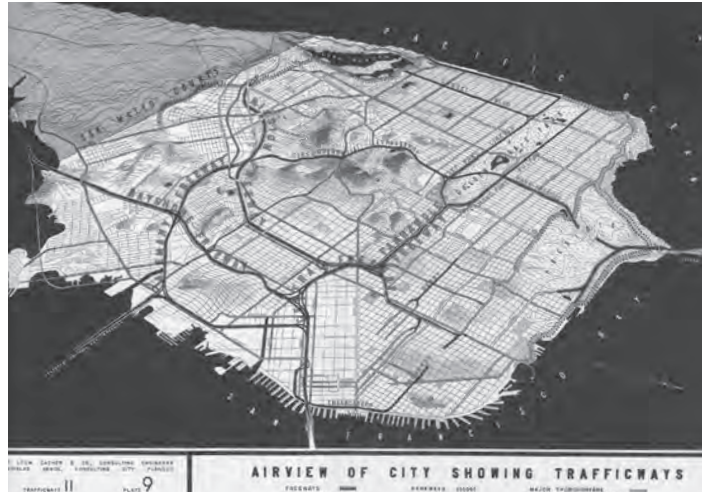
The ultimate piece of traffic-moving technology was, of course, the freeway, which eliminated all functions from the street except the smooth flow of traffic. It was based on early experiments with limited-access roadways, including the German autobahn, and partially separated expressways in many parts of the U.S. The true, grade separated, limited-access freeway became the holy grail that would peel auto traffic away from congested city streets, into sinuous, abstract realm of safe, efficient movement. To that end, neighborhoods would be condemned and demolished, and gargantuan structures imposed on the fabric of the city.

4. Urban Renewal and Growth Coalitions

Urban renewal (a general term for federally-assisted redevelopment) had its roots in the New Deal, in the sometimes uneasy alliances between public housing advocates, unions and real estate interests. After World War II, downtown boosters and city planners, faced with postwar urban decline and suburbanization, joined these “growth coalitions” in pushing for federal urban renewal legislation to “save the cities”.

The 1949 Federal Housing Act funded additional public housing and created the basic framework for urban renewal, calling for “the realization as soon as feasible of the goal of a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family.”

Under the program, areas found to be “blighted” by local authorities—“slums”—could be



Trafficways Plan (1948)

The 1948 Trafficways Plan is one of numerous versions of a comprehensive freeway system for San Francisco. It includes proposals for freeways up the Pandhandle and on either side of Golden Gate Park, as well as freeway approaches to a proposed Southern Crossing bridge. Many of these proposals were carried forward, but most were cancelled after vigorous citizen opposition.

condemned through eminent domain, and the federal government would pay two-thirds of the cost of “slum clearance” programs. Land could then be bid out for private development. The federal funds created a huge financial incentive for blight findings, especially in poor neighborhoods near downtowns. Amendments in 1954 and 1961 allowed more commercial uses, and urban renewal increasingly emphasized office buildings and convention centers over low-income housing.

Although the 1949 Act required relocation assistance for residents, in practice this was rarely provided. Most residents were poor, minority renters, and tended to be scattered into racially exclusive housing markets where mass demolitions were worsening existing shortages. New development was mostly upscale, far out of reach of those displaced. Because demolition proceeded before development

deals were in place, demolished neighborhoods often sat vacant for a decade or more. Urban renewal destroyed far more

housing than it built. Anger—and litigation—over its impacts surged, and federal policy gradually grew more inclusive. Under the Nixon administration, the program was finally abandoned in favor of community development block grants, which remains the predominant framework for federal aid to cities.

5. The Deepest Scar: Urban Renewal in SF Race and Redevelopment

People of color were excluded from most urban neighborhoods by a combination of restrictive covenants and simple prejudice. In the 1930s, the Federal Housing Administration codified such discrimination mortgage underwriting guidelines that excluded “inharmonious racial groups”. This led to decades of decades of redlining, which starved minority neighborhoods



Golden Gateway

The Golden Gateway Redevelopment Area (adopted in 1959) replaced the wholesale produce market, which moved to Islais Creek. The ambitious first phase, completed in 1964, created an upscale residential zone of widely-spaced residential towers over a series of elevated plazas linked by footbridges, in keeping with Modernist ideals. The second phase, Atlanta developer-architect John Portman’s Embarcadero Center, was completed in the early 1980s as a planned expansion of the Financial District.



“In the Western Addition the people of San Francisco can begin remaking the city, can literally clear away the mistakes of the past and better than they ever built before, guided by foresight.” —1947 WA-1 redevelopment study

of mortgage capital.

In San Francisco, racial discrimination in housing and employment was commonplace, leading to overcrowding and public health problems in enclaves like Chinatown. Racism played a major role in the Western Addition. More than 5,000 San Francisco Japanese-Americans were interned in 1942, forced to sell off homes and businesses. At the same time, large numbers of African-Americans arrived in the city to work in wartime industries, and found themselves excluded from nearly everywhere else. With the war over, industrial jobs declined, and many black workers were shut out of local unions.

The wholesale displacement of the African-American community from the Fillmore coincided with the decline of industrial jobs—more than 8,000 when Hunter’s Point shipyard closed in 1974—and a sustained increase in housing costs. Since 1970, the black population of San Francisco has declined nearly 40 percent, and many African-Americans say they just don’t feel a part of the city.

The Western Addition

The San Francisco Redevelopment Agency’s clearance of The Western Addition is one of the most disturbing chapters in San Francisco’s experiment with Urban Renewal. Since the early 1940s, the Western Addition had been identified as in numerous reports as “blighted”. Its aging Victorians were considered outdated firetraps, and many had been subdivided in to tenement units with grossly inadequate plumbing and ventilation.



What advocates of redevelopment failed to notice was a vibrant working-class community, centered on Fillmore Street that supported local businesses and churches and nurtured the West Coast’s most important jazz scene at clubs like Jimbo’s Bop City and Elsie’s Breakfast Club.

The 28-block A-1 project was approved in 1956, and demolition began the next year. Plans called for luxury apartments, a Japanese Cultural and Trade Center, and the conversion of Geary Boulevard into a six-lane expressway. More than 3,000 families had been displaced by 1960, and the SFRA failed to provide the legally mandated relocation assistance. A rising chorus of objections led to a few moderate-income co-ops developed by unions and church

groups, but only one displaced family returned to A-1.

The A-2, a much larger area, was established in 1964, with promises of a real relocation program and an emphasis on rehabilitation. Although a few Victorians were saved, 11,000 units of low-cost housing were demolished and only 7,000 built.



The new housing was generally of poor quality, and the blocks slated for private development sat vacant for decades, a constant reminder of the community that had been. Under pressure from civil rights groups and lawsuit by the Western Addition Community Organization, the SFRA issued 4,729 housing preference vouchers were issued for the A-2 area. Fewer than 1,100 were redeemed, reflecting the lack of available housing and the bitter mistrust many still feel toward the Redevelopment Agency, particularly among African-Americans.

The Contextualists

Protecting the historical city

Many San Franciscans were shocked by the upheaval wrought in the name of "Modernization". The scars of large-scale demolition and freeway projects, and the apparent disregard for both the urban fabric and local communities, led many to conclude that the "experts" had it profoundly wrong. Around the country, writers like Jane Jacobs and Kevin Lynch began to articulate a new view of the city that embraced its multilayered richness and complexity, where the Moderns strove for rational clarity.

In a variety of different ways, they argued, city planning must take its cues from the existing context. Urban designers began to emphasize close analysis of existing forms and patterns as the most important basis for new interventions while historic preservationists asserted the value of older buildings and launched campaigns to protect them. Activists and community groups insisted that planning respond to the needs and priorities of existing residents, not sweep them aside, and they created new kinds of institutions, like Community Development Corporations and nonprofit housing developers.

Community and preservation groups forged formidable political alliances, and answered the postwar growth coalition with an anti-high-rise and growth control agenda. Many viewed both government and business—historically major instigators of planning activity—with suspicion, and developed a legal and political toolkit for stopping misbegotten projects. The Contextualists pushed for a bottom-up approach that was the antithesis of Modernism: incremental rather than visionary, local rather than comprehensive, and protective rather than transformative.

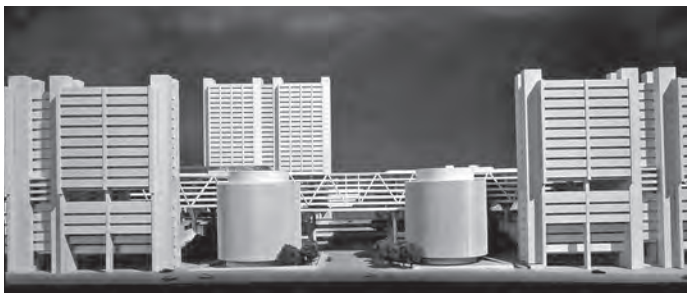


1. The Freeway Revolt

One of the first and most dramatic episodes of citizen resistance to the Moderns' brave new world began in 1956, when the *Chronicle* printed a map of the extensive freeway system proposed for San Francisco, including the Embarcadero and Park-Panhandle routes. The completion of the Bayshore Freeway in 1953 revealed both the seriousness of the plans and the disruptive impact of urban freeways. It was the last freeway completed.

Opposition quickly mounted, and community groups organized and launched petition drives

in many affected areas. In 1959, with the Embarcadero under construction, the Board of Supervisors voted to cancel seven out of 10 proposed freeways, but the Panhandle-Golden Gate proposal remained. Sue Bierman, a self-styled "Haight mom," organized the Haight-Ashbury Neighborhood Council (HANC) and led a surge of local opposition, culminating in the project's cancellation in 1964, by a single vote. It was a dramatic turnabout, inspiring efforts around the country and launching many local community organizations. The stubbed ends of the Embarcadero, Central and 280 Freeways were stark reminders of the episode



for decades. The halting and removal of these ill-conceived freeways is among the most widely-celebrated citizen movements in the city's history.

In 1989, the Loma Prieta earthquake badly damaged the Embarcadero and Central Freeways. The Embarcadero was torn down in 1991. The Central Freeway was the subject of three separate ballot initiatives, but was finally demolished North of Market Street, replaced by Octavia Boulevard.

2. Planning for Whom? Community Development and Social Equity Planning

Yerba Buena Center

For a century, Market Street divided San Francisco's Central Business District from the workshops, factories, and working-class housing to the South. By the 1950s, SOMA was an affordable if shabby district of rooming houses and residential hotels, occupied mostly by single older men, retired from industrial and maritime work. Commercial interests began eyeing SOMA for tourist and convention facilities, and after several false starts, plans were approved in 1964. A series of architectural schemes imagined a controlled, inward-looking complex that turned away from the streets and their "undesirable" citizens.

Evictions and demolition

began in 1967 with no effective provisions for relocation. But the SFRA had not counted on the will of the residents, many of whom, like George Woolf and Peter Mendelsohn, were radical veterans of San Francisco's labor movement. In 1969, they organized Tenants and Owners in Opposition to Redevelopment (TOOR) and filed suit against HUD to demand affordable replacement housing within the neighborhood. Some labor unions broke ranks with the growth machine, objecting to the displacement of blue-collar jobs and residents.

The court found the relocation plans inadequate and stopped the project, a major victory for poor residents who had been arrogantly dismissed as "bums"



and "derelicts". TOOR drew up its own plan calling for 2,000 units of affordable housing. When the legal battle ended, the SFRA was obliged to plan for 1,500 units of affordable housing and to provide four

sites within the area. TOOR was rechristened TODCO (Tenants and Owners Development Corporation) and became a nonprofit community housing developer. TODCO has since developed more than 1,200 affordable units and provides a range of social services for low-income SOMA residents.

Localism and Identity Politics: The Rise of the Neighborhoods

The cultural upheavals of the 1960s gave rise to grassroots organizations in many neighborhoods, often emerging from local issues and corresponding to the city's patchwork of ethnicities and subcultures. A new politics of identity and self-determination inspired organizing and activism among gays in the Castro, Latinos in the Mission, African-Americans in the Fillmore, and Asians in Chinatown. These groups not only asserted control of their own neighborhoods, but they also formed the basis of new political coalitions, led by politicians like Willie Brown, John Burton and George Moscone, who challenged the labor-business growth coalitions at City Hall. Increasingly, San Francisco's political landscape was framed as "The Neighborhoods" vs. "Downtown".

A 1976 ballot initiative created district elections for the Board of Supervisors, and 1977 Harvey Milk, Gordon Lau, and Ellen Hill Hutch were elected the first openly gay, Chinese-American and female African-American Supervisors. Moscone and Milk were assassinated the next year.

"The Transamerica 'pyramid' exhibits the essentially archaic and regressive nature of the science fiction mind."

—Lewis Mumford (writer and critic)



The Mission Coalition: The Fruits of Community Organizing

The Mission Coalition Organization (MCO) a federation of community groups, emerged from a successful 1967 effort to resist Urban Renewal proposals in the Mission District.

Mayor Alioto then proposed applying for Federal funding under the Model Cities program, and community leaders organized the coalition to establish a local platform and ensure the program met local needs. The MCO was rooted in Saul Alinsky's community organizing model as well as the civil right movement, and brought together more than 100 different local organizations to find common ground and campaign for community priorities. The MCO established a hiring hall and pressured local employers to hire locally. It organized dozens of tenants organizations, pressured the school district and other public agencies to be more responsive, and created Mission neighborhood plan.

Although the MCO disbanded in 1973, it left behind a remarkable legacy of community organizations and social service providers, many of which are still active.

3. Respect for Pattern: Contextual Urban Design

Shocked by the wholesale demolition of urban renewal, and disappointed with the alien, sanitized environments that followed, many people in San Francisco and elsewhere began to defend the qualities of traditional urban fabric. Often, these were the very elements the Modernism sought to replace: a mixed and messy vitality, surprise and happenstance, incremental change, social, spatial and functional diversity.

Even as urban renewal projects gained momentum around the country, a few critics, including Jane Jacobs, William Whyte and Kevin Lynch began articulating what was missing/being lost in the modern vision. They put forward nuanced observations of cities' human fabric: the intimate scale, and fine-grained vitality that was lost when neighborhoods were demolished and could not be replicated in sanitized single-use environments. In particular, they made an argument for the life of the street, a complex urban space that is as much a living room, theater, and marketplace as a "trafficway".



Locally, researchers like Donald Appleyard and Elizabeth Moudon produced in-depth studies of San Francisco's urban form, tracing its history,



"We Won't Move" The Fall of The International Hotel

In the Fall of 1968, about 150 tenants at the 3-story International Hotel at Jackson and Kearney received eviction notices. They were mostly elderly Filipino men. The I-Hotel was at the center of Manilatown, a block long stretch of Filipino businesses well-known to the local community and many migrant workers and seamen who spent downtime there. The property, near the expanding Financial District was slated for commercial development.

The evictions became a cause celebre among a many groups concerned about affordable housing and tenants' rights. Student activists and an array of political organizations, including Asian, Latino and gay groups organized protests that lasted nine years, through the sale of the property to a Hong Kong investor and the departure of many tenants. Finally, in August 1977, deputies led by Sheriff Richard Hongisto (who at one time gone to jail rather than enforce the evictions) squared off with demonstrators and evicted tenants by force. It was a devastating blow, and further galvanized activists' sense that commercial expansion was a heartless enemy of urban communities.

and evolution. These ideas resonated strongly among those who found the prevailing views of urban "experts" strangely anti-urban. Allan Jacobs, who served as planning director from 1966-74, personified this new attitude. As an outsider from the Philadelphia, he had both an urban sensibility and a fresh perspective on the conflicts raging over redevelopment. He presided over a department with a far less invasive approach to planning, creating the Urban Design Plan and a series of neighborhood improvements.



4. The Presence of the Past: Historic Preservation

At mid-century, many people did not perceive older buildings—especially wooden, kit-built Victorian houses—as architecturally valuable. They were abundant, out of fashion, and often dilapidated. But by early 1960s, many citizens were becoming alarmed by the wholesale demolition of older buildings, and the lack of a meaningful mechanism for their protection.

Homeowners and amateur historians classified and lovingly restored Victorian homes, and organizations like the Victorian Alliance and Heritage (the Foundation for the Preservation of San Francisco's Architectural Heritage) began pressuring city government to be more assertive in protecting historic buildings. One of Heritage's first projects was arranged the relocation of 14 houses from the Western Addition's A-2 area, then under the wrecking ball. Many public and residential buildings were quickly listed, but older commercial buildings like the City of Paris department store



continued to be demolished, leading Heritage to publish *Splendid Survivors*, a downtown historic survey that influenced the Downtown Plan's ambitious preservation policies.

5. “Manhattan-ization” and the High-Rise Growth Wars

In the 1960s, global economic forces led to a shift in the U.S. economy, away from manufacturing and heavy industry, and toward information-based industries such as technology and finance. The Bay Area's beautiful setting, open culture and major universities positioned it to compete in an innovation economy, by attracting creative, educated workers. San Francisco burgeoned as a “headquarters city” for the emerging service-based economy.

Between 1965 and 1982, the city's office space more than doubled, to over 60 million gross square feet, resulting in dramatic and controversial changes to the character of the downtown. Many felt that the city's unique qualities were under siege from what Herb Caen called a “vertical earthquake,” and opposition to high-rise buildings surged. Especially controversial were the

Friedel Klussmann

In 1947, Friedel Klussmann formed San Francisco Beautiful in response to Mayor Lapham's plan to scrap what remained of the city's cable cars. “The Ladies,” as they were known, asserted the cable cars' importance to tourism, and built a formidable citizen's movement, eventually making them a national “moving landmark”. It was the first of many successful preservation campaigns.



Bank of America Building (1969) and Transamerica Pyramid (1972) which were viewed as threatening northward expansions of downtown.

6. The Downtown Plan

The Downtown high-rise boom produced a series of ballot initiatives by growth-control advocates, along with bitter case-by-case fights over new buildings and warring studies on the fiscal impacts of high-rises. A long-term compromise seemed essential, and the Planning Department, led by Dean Macris, set out to develop the city's first Downtown Plan. The intent was to provide a framework for continued commercial development that would reduce impacts on the downtown's livability and character, protect historic buildings, and channel growth away from adjacent neighborhoods.

The Downtown Plan created new downtown boundaries, excluding Chinatown, The Tenderloin, and North Beach, and Telegraph Hill, and shifting development south and east, toward the Transbay Terminal and Rincon Hill. It protected 266 historic buildings, and defined conservation districts, like Belden Alley, where intact pockets



A building that typifies Downtown Plan design guidelines: The older building is protected, and the building mass steps back as it rises. Rooflines must provide “visual interest” which many architects feel enforces postmodern aesthetics, and Allan Temko glibly referred to “as a profusion of funny hats”.

of traditional fabric would be preserved. Permitted height and bulk of new buildings zone were considerably reduced, and design guidelines introduced.

The Downtown Plan represented a “grand compromise” in the high-rise growth wars, significantly shifting the location, form, and impact of commercial development, while allowing San Francisco to respond successfully to global economic shifts that called for a service and innovation-based economy.

Prop M

Ironically, it was immediately following approval of the Downtown Plan that a powerful growth-control initiative finally passed. In 1986, Proposition M capped office development at 400,000 square feet per year and introduced a “beauty contest” to determine what could be built. Its actual impact has been modest, since real estate cycles have kept average annual demand at or near the annual limit.

In 1971 and again in 1972, a local businessman named Alvin Duskin put a measure on the ballot that would have limited all Downtown development to 72 feet — shorter than many Victorian commercial buildings. He enlisted artists to create a coloring book in support of the measure. Although the measures failed (in part because in one case the wording inadvertently raised neighborhood heights to 72 ft.) the concerns clearly resonated for many people, and high-rise development remained a major issue into the 1980s.



The Eco-Urbanists

Forging a green metropolis for the post-carbon age

The last two decades have seen a reframing of debates over growth, density and change in San Francisco. For many critics, the growth-control policies of the Contextualists have enshrined an essentially conservative attitude toward the city, unsustainable in the context of a crippling housing shortage, explosive regional sprawl, and a looming climate crisis. A new generation of activists and planners view density at the urban core as the critical ingredient in a more sustainable, equitable and prosperous Bay Area.

This movement is built on a simple insight: city dwellers have a much smaller ecological footprint than their suburban counterparts. They drive less, live in smaller, more efficient homes, and share public amenities. Eco-urbanism celebrates the virtues of traditional city neighborhoods, but also strives to add new districts that are compact, walkable, inclusive and efficient, translating growth into urban vitality and public life instead of traffic and pollution. It seeks a more accessible city, through ambitious improvements in transit and cycling infrastructure, and new strategies to bring down the cost of housing.

Buildings, streets, and public spaces are challenged to engage the problems of energy, water, waste, and climate, modeling the complex interconnectedness of ecological systems. It is a vision that offers a way forward, an affirmative agenda that strives to internalize the lessons of earlier generations while turning to face our immense common challenges.

A New Attitude: From Growth Control to Smart Growth

The past 20 years have seen a broadening in Bay Area environmental consciousness beyond the conservation of nature toward sustainable development. In the late 1970s and early 80s, a few green visionaries took an interest in the integration of ecological systems and dense urban communities. Later, in 1989, a group of planners and architects created the Ahwanee Principles for Resource-Efficient Communities, laying out basic concepts for the creation of compact, walkable mixed-use neighborhoods. These became the basis of the influential 1996 Charter of the New Urbanism, which brought sound planning and community design fundamentals to a wide new audience.

Bay Area environmental

activists also began turning their attention to infill development as the essential counterpoint to conservation. Urban Ecology published "Blueprint for A Sustainable Bay Area" in 1996 emphasizing links between density, affordable housing and transit. The Greenbelt Alliance, Bay Area Transportation and Land Use Coalition (now TransForm) and Livable City, have taken similar stances, a shift that has at times caused tension with those who view development as the enemy of conservation.

The Case for Density: Climate, Sprawl, and the Built Environment

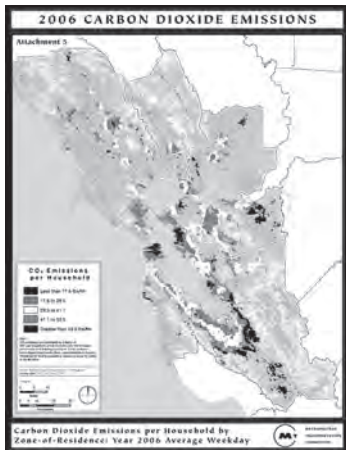
San Francisco's 2004 Climate Action Plan sets an ambitious emissions-reduction goal: a 20 percent reduction from 1990 levels by 2012. Thus far the pace of implementation is not likely to



meet the target. SPUR recently released a major study comparing implementation options by cost and effectiveness.

The two largest sources of greenhouse gases—cars and buildings—are closely linked to city planning decisions. Adding 40,000 households to transit-rich San Francisco (10 percent more than ABAG mandates) would result in a reduction of 218 million vehicle miles traveled. Job growth in San Francisco would also have a major impact, since 50 percent of downtown, San Francisco workers commute by transit, more than five times the regional average.

The most powerful emissions-reduction option is more compact land use at the regional scale, which could reduce emis-



Location has a powerful correlation with greenhouse gas emissions. Residents and workers at the urban core emit far less, but most growth has occurred in suburban areas.

sions by 3 million metric tons per year. The region's explosive growth and lack of regional land use planning have resulted in the proliferation of low-density suburban development across the Central Valley and into the Sierra foothills. We cannot stop regional population growth, which is driven by job creation. But the

ecological footprint of each new resident depends above all on whether they live in transit- and pedestrian-oriented city centers or auto-dependent suburbs.

The Housing Crisis: Density, Equity, Affordability

Housing scarcity affects low-income people most of all. Low-income people are more transit dependent, more vulnerable to high rents, and more likely to work multiple jobs. The public amenities provided in dense urban settings—transit, parks and walkable streets—benefit everyone, but are especially important to those of modest means, who can't fall back on a car or a private garden.

SPUR supports policies that promote the construction of substantially more housing at all income levels, by securing resources for permanently affordable housing, upzoning along transit corridors, creating middle-income housing that is "affordable by design" and reducing parking requirements. In 2002, SPUR helped craft San Francisco's Citywide Inclusionary Housing policy, which was strengthened in 2006 to require market-rate housing to provide some units below market rate: 15 percent onsite, or 20 percent offsite or via "in-lieu fees". In Redevelopment Areas, San Francisco has spent nearly 50 percent of tax increment funds on affordable housing, well above the 20 percent state mandate.

Affordable housing in San Francisco is generally produced and managed by nonprofit housing developers, who provide an array of specialized housing serving seniors, the formerly homeless, families with children and people with HIV/AIDS. In 2008, 823 new affordable housing



case study: Folsom+Dore

Architect: David Baker

Developer: Citizens Housing

These 98 rental units of supportive affordable housing serve tenants with special needs, such as physical and developmental disabilities, HIV/AIDS and chronic homelessness. Folsom + Dore is the first new building in San Francisco to receive a LEED Silver rating. Residential parking has been greatly reduced, making way for a hybrid car-share vehicle and protected bicycle parking.



units were built in San Francisco, out of 3,340 total new units—the most since 1965, but still far from adequate.

Transportation: A New Urgency

Transit is the backbone of urban mobility and the key reducing carbon emissions. Although Muni serves more than 700,000 people per day, and San Francisco has a vastly larger transit ridership per person than anywhere else in the region, we have not managed to fund and operate a system that would draw large numbers of people away from their cars for most trips. In 1998, attempts to implement a new Automatic Train Control resulted in the "Muni Meltdown," stranding thousands and creating a new

urgency for improvements to the system. The next year, Proposition E consolidated Muni and the Department of Parking and Traffic into the Municipal Transportation Agency, with the goal of implementing transit-first priorities. In recent years, public pressure, sustained advocacy by SPUR and others, and internal reform efforts have begun to bear fruit. The T-Third light rail line, serving Bayview and Visitacion Valley, opened in 2007, and will connect to the Central Subway to Chinatown and North Beach, beginning construction this year. More recently, Muni has launched the Transit Effectiveness Project, which targets the busiest routes for major improvements in speed and reliability.



Dreaming the Future of Transit

Transportation planner and advocate Brian Stokle created this map as part of a series that envisions how transit might develop in the coming decades. Equal part planning, advocacy, fantasy and artwork, it adopts some of Muni's graphic conventions, but mixes services, agencies and modes to represent a full network the way a rider experiences it. Highlights include the Central Subway, Geary and Van Ness BRT, high-speed rail, a SOMA BART line and a second transbay tube. Stokle is one of many avid urbanists shaping the future through blogs and informal connections.

Bicycling

The bicycle is among the most efficient machines every devised, and is an ideal mode of urban transportation: light, fast, affordable, healthy and clean. Cyclists put themselves on the city's agenda through Critical Mass, the boisterous and controversial monthly rides in which thousands of cyclists take to the streets, upending their usually marginal position in traffic.

San Francisco's cycling movement, led by the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition, has grown into a potent political force, campaigning for cycling infrastructure and for a broader sustainable city agenda. New bike lanes on Valencia Street resulted in a 144 percent increase in cyclists there,

and reduced pedestrian and vehicle accidents as well. In 2005, the Citywide Bike Plan won unanimous approval from the Board of Supervisors, but a lawsuit quickly halted its implementation order after a judge found that it was—ironically—subject



to environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act. With that review nearly complete, the stage is set for construction of the plan's Citywide Bicycle Network.

City CarShare

In 2001, bay area transit activists Elizabeth Sullivan and Kate White, working with SPUR and the City, created the nonprofit City CarShare. Based on commercial models in European cities, car-sharing allows members to have car access while avoiding the high fixed costs of car ownership. The pay-as-you-go approach results in less driving and lower costs, as well as fewer cars in the city.



BRT: a new transit model

Bus Rapid Transit provides the operational characteristics of rail—smooth, uninterrupted service, predictability, and passenger amenities—with the flexibility and low cost of rubber-tired vehicles. Buses run in dedicated lanes and pull up level with platforms, where pre-paid passengers board through all doors. Pioneered in Curitiba, Brazil, BRT has emerged as one of the most important innovations in urban public transit, and is proposed for the Geary and Van Ness corridors in San Francisco.

The Green Building Movement

Recent efforts to build in harmony with nature are rooted in utopian escapes from the human community, and the earthships and bioshelters that worked out many green building fundamentals made a point of being “off the grid”. But as the efficiencies of urban life became more widely appreciated, green building has come to the city and become technologically and aesthetically adventurous. In 1996, The U.S Green Building Council launched LEED, or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, its benchmark standard for green building certification. It assigns points for a wide range of factors like energy and water savings, sustainable materials and location efficiency.

In 2008, San Francisco enacted a Green Building Ordinance that will require all new construction and large building renovations to meet some of the highest green building standards in the country. The ordinance requires new buildings to meet increasingly higher levels of two green building rating systems: LEED for commercial buildings and GreenPoint Rated for homes. It also requires projects to achieve specific goals important in San Francisco, including water efficiency, onsite stormwater retention, and providing space for separated waste streams.

Resource Flows and Human Ecology:

Bay Area residents have a keen awareness of the resource flows that sustain our lives. One of the most visible and powerful aspects of this is the region's food culture, which since the



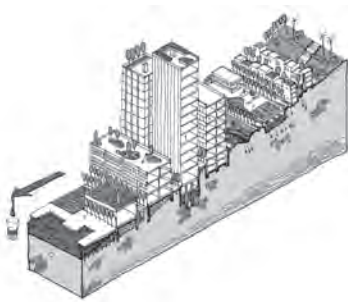
The California Academy of Sciences is the world's largest LEED-Platinum public building. Its undulating, 197,000 square-foot green roof can retain 3.6 million gallons of rainwater each year and has become an instant icon. The structure incorporates recycled steel and fly-ash concrete and is insulated with used denim batting, and is passively cooled and ventilated.

1970s has not only launched a revolution in fresh seasonal cuisine, but has nurtured a local organic agriculture industry and the network of distributors, farmers' markets, stores, and restaurants to support it. The Ferry Building—liberated from the freeway and rehabilitated, re-opened in 2001, has become a mecca for local and artisanal food. Still, many poor communities lack access to fresh food, spurring local activists to create school and community gardens, and to advocate for markets and grocery stores in underserved communities.

San Francisco has the highest recycling rate in the country, diverting 70 percent of solid waste from landfills, which includes residential food waste composting and the collection of waste oil to power city vehicles. Still, we could do better if composting and recycling were mandatory, which could result in a 186,700 Metric Ton annual reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

Green Infrastructure and Ecological Systems

In an urban setting, water runs quickly off of impermeable roofs and paved surfaces, carrying pollutants with it. In combined sewer and stormwater systems like San Francisco's, heavy runoff can also lead to overflows that send untreated sewage into local waterways. Eliminating impermeable surfaces and increasing the retention of stormwater slows runoff and prevents overflows. This creates a new imperative for the sustainable design of cities: re-imagining urban surfaces as green infrastructure.



The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission has introduced Low-Impact Design Guidelines to promote green infrastructure throughout the urban environment, to protect waterways, prevent flooding, provide habitat and open space amenities, and conserve water. This kind of dense interconnectedness, serving multiple, mutually reinforcing functions is at the heart of the ecological city.



Crissy Field

Crissy field, which was restored and reopened in 2003, combines historic preservation, open space, and ecological restoration on a single multifaceted site. The design, by Hargreaves and Associates, reveals its history as an aviation hub while inviting intensive recreational use and restoring fragile dune and saltwater wetland ecosystems.

“Green Civics” and Visionary Imagination

PARK(ing) Day, 2008

The Eco-Urbanist moment has found expression in arenas beyond city planning, through art, intervention and creative happenings that take urbanism



as their subject, and pursue a kind of “green civics” that celebrates and explores the built environment. PARK(ing) Day, instigated by the Rebar collective, is an annual investigation of how public space is allocated. Participants convert parking spaces into temporary parks, treating meters as short-term leases and creating impromptu gatherings. Groups like The Bureau of Urban Secrets, Mundane Journeys, and city|space have pursued similar investigations.



The Slow Food Nation Victory Garden grew in City Hall Park last summer, showing San Francisco's enthusiasm for greening, and producing more than 1,000 pounds of fresh, healthy food for those in need.





In this competition scheme, Anne Fougeron imagines the Bay Area of 2108, in which a network of agricultural skyscrapers create a local organic food system for 10 million residents, fed by reclaimed water. It typifies the visionary qualities of Eco-Urbanism, combining bold thinking, contemporary aesthetics, local values and a fascination with ecological processes.



Agents of Change image credits

The City Builders

p6 map of San Francisco, 1852, Britten and Rey, David Rumsey Collection

p7 left to right: Sand dunes from Cliff House, 1865, San Francisco Public Library; William C. Ralston, ca. 1872, SFPL

p8 top to bottom: The Spring Valley Water Company system, 1922, U.C. Berkeley Geography Library; Cable cars at Powell and Sutter, 1896, San Francisco Public Library; Union Iron Works at Potrero Point, ca. 1918 Bethlehem Shipbuilding Corporation pamphlet

p9 top to bottom: GG Park, by A.M. Freeman and Co., 1892, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley; Sunol Water Temple, Willis Polk, 1922, SFPL; Frederick Law Olmstead; Dennis Kearney addresses The Workingmen's Party, 1877, SFPL

The Progressives and Classicists

p12 Abe Ruef, ca. 1910 Courtesy SFPL

p13 top to bottom: Alice Griffith, SPUR archives; San Francisco following 1906 earthquake and fire, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division; James Duval Phelan, 1915, SFPL

The Regionalists

p14 The Bay Counties, 1925, Regional Plan Association

p15 top to bottom: Key System Streetcar Medallion, 1940s, BAERRA; Key Route timetables and maps, 1938, BAERRA; constructing Powell Street BART station, 1969, SFPL; Jack Kent, 1965, SFPL

p16 left to right: Esther Gulick, Sylvia McLaughlin and Kay Kerr, mid-1960s; "Bay or River?" 1960, Army Corps of Engineers, Sylvia McLaughlin; GGNRA, 1971, by David Dugan; Amy Meyer, 1970s, GGNRA

p17 early map of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, 1974, courtesy GGNRA Park Archives

The Moderns

p18 Valencia Gardens, 1943, CED archives, UC Berkeley; Catherine Bauer Wurster, CED archives, UC Berkeley

p19 top to bottom: Parkmerced, 1951, SFPL; Dorothy Erskine, ca. 1950, courtesy John Erskine; Now is the Time to Plan, 1941, Telesis and the SF Planning and Housing Association, CED archives, UC Berkeley

p20 top to bottom: San Francisco Trafficways plan, 1948, Deleuw and Cather Engineers, courtesy SF Dept. of City Planning; Golden Gateway marketing brochure, circa 1964 Courtesy SF Redevelopment Agency

p21 The Fillmore District, 1940s, by David Johnson, courtesy D. Johnson/Togonon Gallery; Demolition in the Western Addition, 1953, SFPL; Japanese evacuees await processing, by Dorothea Lange, courtesy Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley

The Contextualists

p22 top to bottom: Protestors at "Save us from the Freeway" hearing at City Hall, 1966, SF Chronicle; Construction halted on the Embarcadero freeway, ca. 1960. Photo by Karl Kortum, copyright Jean Kortum, SFPL

p23 left to right: Kenzo Tange's proposal for Yerba Buena Center Redevelopment Area, 1969, photo by Gerald Ratto; George Woolf; Mission Coalition community meeting, ca. 1971, photo by Mike Miller

p24 left to right: Contemporary contextualist housing; Protesters outside the International Hotel, 1977, Manilatown Heritage Foundation; Victorian houses being moved for preservation, 1976, photo by David Glass

p25 left to right: Preserved historic building downtown; Cable Car Ladies, 1947; Alvin Duskin high-rise coloring book, 1971, courtesy John Kriken; Postmodern "hat" building, 2009 by Benjamin Grant

The Eco-Urbanists

p26 Bishop Ranch, Pacific Aerial Survey/HJW Geospatial, Inc.

p27 top to bottom: Folsom + Dore, 2007, David Baker + Partners Architects; Bay Area CO2 emissions, 2006, courtesy MTC

p28 top to bottom: "2030 Rail and Rapid Lines," 2009, Brian Stokle; rendering of Van Ness Bus Rapid Transit, 2009, courtesy SFMTA; Critical Mass, Chris Carlsson

p29 Calif. Academy of Sciences, 2008, Renzo Piano Building Workshop; Crissy Field, Hargreaves Associates; Park(ing) Day, 2008; Slow Food Nation Victory Garden, 2008, Katie Standke; Garden Participant, 2008, Katie Standke; Low impact design guidelines, SFPUC

p30 Bay Area in 2108, 2009, Fougeron Architecture

The ironies of history

Gabriel Metcalf is the executive director of SPUR.

We began work on the first exhibit in the Urban Center with the modest goal of telling the story of San Francisco. Not just the traditional story of mayors and business tycoons, and not just the traditional planning story that follows the movements within the design professions — but the story that weaves all the strands together. The story that can comprehend the General Strike and the civil rights movement; the invention of the elevator and the automobile; City Beautiful and bioregionalism; wartime migrations and Prop. 13; all of it.

We worked the way SPUR always works, by gathering together some of the best thinkers to pool their knowledge and perspectives, and added to that the stories that other historians have gathered. And eventually, we re-learned what every historian knows: that it is impossible to truly understand what actually happened in the past, because even when we narrow our focus to one place, so many forces were at work, so many accidents turned out to matter, and so many dramas have been lost to time.

THE IRONIES OF HISTORY

Walter Benjamin, writing about the impossibility of ever understanding how the dark episodes of modernity could happen, describes the despair of trying to comprehend history:

A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past.

Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.¹

Society changes in ways that escape the understanding of the very people who make it change, and history is filled with ironies. Think of Daniel Burnham sitting in his shack on top of Twin Peaks in 1905, devising his Parisian remake of San Francisco. The 1906 earthquake and fire seemed to present the perfect opportunity to realize some of the Burnham Plan's main ideas, but the urgency of quick reconstruction made it impossible. Meanwhile, the power structure saw its opportunity to grab the desirable real estate of Chinatown, thinking the inhabitants would be vulnerable after the destruction. Instead, it turned out the Chinese population was more flexible, could raise capital, and could move faster to rebuild than the rest of the city. They outflanked the opposition politically by mobilizing Chinese government pressure on the federal government to ensure they were not kicked out. In the end advocates were able to convince local leaders that rebuilding Chinatown in its original location — to both house the Chinese residents and attract Western tourists — would benefit the local economy.

Another irony: BART, conceived in the 1950s, the heyday of postwar technological optimism, was designed during the transitional decade of the 1960s, and opened during the 1970s to an utterly changed landscape. No longer did every community in the region uncritically welcome the growth that BART was intended to enable. Instead, it opened to a wave of down-zonings that would have been inconceivable to its inventors, forestalling the dream of a region of transit villages for at least four decades.²

THE MYSTERY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

This exhibit, and the opening of the Urban Center on the 50th anniversary of the San Francisco Planning and Housing Association's reformulation as "SPUR," the "R" originally referring to "renewal," provides us with a moment to reflect on our own attempts to make history. SPUR has never been just an observer, but has provided a place for idealistic people, who cared deeply about San Francisco, to try to make the city better. With the benefit of hindsight, some of the efforts

² Thank you to Michael Teitz for many enlightening conversations about the "ironies of history" and for supplying me with anecdotes for this piece.

¹ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken Books, 1969, p. 257.

of previous generations at SPUR seem farsighted and wise, as in advocacy for BART, for regional government, for removal of elevated freeways, or for a new economic base to replace the older industrial economy after World War II. But other policies pursued by SPUR appear deeply misguided, especially support for the removal of “substandard” housing under the program of urban renewal. Urban renewal turned out to be the only time planners in America gained real power over private property, and the brutality of the program ensured that planners are not likely to be trusted with that kind of power ever again.

Robert Fishman, the leading historian of American planning, identifies the real engine of change in the physical landscape of our country as “the urban conversation” between civic groups, newspapers, business interests, and social movements. In a country with a weak centralized government and a distrust of government regulation, this is how change happens:

Although the specifics of the planning problems differ, the basic themes of the urban conversation are always the same: how to justify public action to a society that is deeply individualistic; how to support long-term investment strategies in a society built on short-term gains; how to justify the taxation of private profit for the common resources and the common good. This urban conversation — rather than any centralized government — has been the ultimate source of the authority that generated the outputting of investment in roads, bridges, waterworks, schools, libraries, and other public facilities...³

Fishman calls on us to return to the power of the urban conversation as the way to make progress on the problems we face today:

If the wonders of American planning have been less in evidence in recent years, and if its powers have been less robust, one explanation is that planning has forsaken the language and strategies of the urban conversation for the technical discourse of the academy and the bureaucracy, and abandoned the strategy of public persuasion for a delusive centralization that sought to bypass the need for public support.⁴

In other words, Fishman argues that the only way to make real progress on the great planning problems is to build civic will to solve them. SPUR's role through its entire history has been to help facilitate this urban conversation and serve as one of the leading voices thinking about the future of the city.

But after a century of work, stretching back to the formation of the San Francisco Housing Association in 1911, how can so many things have gone wrong? How can the region have sprawled so

At the core of our project, we want to pierce the mystery of social change. We want to understand how history is made by human beings acting intentionally, but within the context of larger forces and structures.

disastrously? How can San Francisco have become so unaffordable? How can we be a city with so few children?

Here is the mystery we have to understand: as we are trying to change history according to our own vision of a good city, we are acting within forces that only become clear in hindsight — changes in the structure of the economy, cultural currents that determine how people want to live, technological advances that enable certain possibilities but not others.

At the core of our project, we want to pierce the mystery of social change. We want to understand how history is made by human beings acting intentionally, but within the context of larger forces and structures. As a great historian once said, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.”⁵

Take this exhibition as a first preface to the interpretation of the layers of structure and agency that were involved with the creation of the city we know today, with its complicated mix of good and bad.

GENERATIONS OF CIVIC IDEALISM

We have organized the exhibit into a series of generations of people, loosely representing social movements that tried to remake the city and region in particular ways. At various points these generations built on each other's work or came into conflict with one another. And from this interplay of agendas, the city changed over time.

In our version of the story, the City-Builders create the initial framework for urban growth, largely in the service of private profit. The Progressives and Classicists try to reform the excesses of 19th century capitalism in various

³ Robert Fishman, “The American Planning Tradition: An Introduction and Interpretation,” in Fishman (ed.), *The American Planning Tradition: Culture and Policy*, Washington, DC: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press (2000), p. 5.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, New York: International Publishers, 1963 [orig. 1852], p. 15.

ways, creating new institutions of self-government and trying to beautify the city. The Regionalists gain prominence in the 1940s and continue until the present, in many ways representing the path not taken. The Moderns envision a complete redesign of the city according to rational planning principles to solve problems of affordable housing and congestion. The Contextualists begin as a reaction against the abuses of the urban renewal and freeways, but are so successful that they become the dominant viewpoint in the city. They are now being challenged by a new generation, the Eco-Urbanists, with a sensibility that embraces urbanity as the key to ecological sustainability.

The Eco-Urbanists accept the lessons of many previous generations including the careful understanding of place-making that the Contextualists taught, but, given the urgency of larger-scale environmental problems, they take these lessons in a new direction. It became clear to the Eco-Urbanists that defending cities the way they already were was not good enough—that some radical changes would be necessary in order to cope with the global climate crisis. For the first time since urban renewal, perhaps, a younger generation feels permission to imagine a better city, rather than only fighting to preserve the preexisting city against the forces of destruction. The Eco-Urbanists are perhaps naïve in their hope that we can have it all: economic prosperity, social equity and ecological balance. But this is, in fact, their ambition.

It should come as no surprise to people who have followed SPUR closely that many of us identify closely with the ideals of the Eco-Urbanists.

We hope that you come away from this exhibit with the curiosity to know more, and that you will be inspired to add your own contribution to the ever-changing city.

There is a cliché that city planning is simply fixing the mistakes of past planners. And this is true not just about planning, but also about so much of history. Social movements, even if they are victorious, tend to achieve consequences they did not intend. And yet, we cannot just sit on the sidelines. There are urgent problems to solve. We have to learn from past mistakes and approach our activism with a sense of humility about all that we can't know. But still we must act.

THE PROJECT OF SAN FRANCISCO

Sir Peter Hall's majestic book, *Cities in Civilization*, tries to distill from history the lessons from humanity's greatest cities, in their periods of greatest cultural achievement, from classical Athens to Weimar Berlin. What is San Francisco's

The Eco-Urbanists are perhaps naïve in their hope that we can have it all: economic prosperity, social equity and ecological balance. But this is, in fact, their ambition.

contribution to the broader project of urbanism? What does it mean for all of us to be working so hard on a city of such a small scale, when, as Enrique Peñalosa reminded us at his talk at SPUR last year, Bogata, Columbia grows by a population equivalent to the entire city of San Francisco every five years?

There are many answers to this question and perhaps it is enough to say that each city and each region on the planet has to try to become as sustainable and wonderful as it can be. But my own viewpoint is that San Francisco has a special role within the United States. In part, it is the inheritor of the California mythology of the place where people could go to make a new start, which is itself a version of the older American mythology of the land that welcomed immigrants from all corners of the world to pursue projects of their own choosing, free from persecution. These ideals live on in San Francisco's cosmopolitanism and celebration of difference, even as the city is pragmatically much more closed than it wants to be as a result of high housing costs. Layered onto this ideal of openness to the outside is San Francisco's progressivism, its self-image as the place where new social movements will be born and will try out their agenda on a city scale before ramping up to something bigger.

San Francisco has a mission to demonstrate the possibilities of progressive urbanism — that it is possible to have an innovative economy and good business climate, while also fostering social equity; that it is possible to protect the heritage of the past while also refocusing the region's growth around transit nodes in existing cities; that it is possible to have a heavily participatory democratic process while also having public services that are work efficiently. Clearly, we have not yet gotten there, have not yet transcended these contradictions into a higher synthesis. But the reason we all care so passionately about this city is because we know it stands for something, we know we are engaged with a great project to demonstrate the highest possibilities of American urbanism. ✨

Planning in pieces

It used to be that you could judge the vitality of a neighborhood by the number of its restaurants and cafes. Apparently not in San Francisco. It was the early 1980s and I had just begun working as a planner for San Francisco's Department of City Planning. My first assignment was the Neighborhood Commercial Rezoning Study. After a brief orientation, my supervisor Robin Jones introduced me to the team and told me I'd be going out in the field that afternoon. Scott Dowdee, a veteran on the project, was assigned to instruct me in the art of the survey. We dashed out the doors of the stolid, granite-faced office building at 450 McAllister Street and into Scott's sleek black Saab. Riding through the city, Scott offered a monologue on his North Carolina upbringing and the history of San Francisco retail streets.

In most of America, older shopping districts had turned into dinosaurs. They'd sprung up in the late 19th and early 20th century when people travelled by electric streetcar. Ever since the Second World War, as automobiles and trucks were pushing the urbanized frontier ever outward, their lifeblood had been sapped. From Philadelphia to Los Angeles, city planners were trying to revitalize neighborhood commerce by sprucing up signage, adding street trees, furniture and small parking lots, and facilitating favorable business loans. But as Scott told me as we raced up Twin Peaks, the issue here in America's most gentrified city wasn't that retail stores were closing up shop. Commerce in the city's numerous upscale neighborhoods was thriving to the point where it upset a great many residents. Along prosperous Union Street in Cow Hollow or Sacramento Street in Presidio Heights, neighborhood associations complained that new restaurants, bars and cafes were crowding out essential services like shoe repair businesses and hardware stores. San Francisco, at least when it came to eating and drinking, had too much of a good thing.

That's where we came in. The Neighborhood Commercial Rezoning Study was tasked to study the city's retail streets to determine the precise mix of uses, uncover any imbalances, and propose remedies. My first survey was Taraval Street, a retail strip in the Parkside where a streetcar still

ran from downtown to its terminus by the Pacific Ocean. Armed with a zoning map, clipboard, and pen, I spent a couple of days combing the street—almost two miles from end to end—and jotting down the name, type and size of each business. In the coming weeks, I surveyed Leland Avenue in Visitation Valley and Outer Mission Street in the Excelsior District. It turns out none of my streets nor many of those surveyed by my colleagues shared the same characteristics or were burdened by similar complaints. 24th Street in the Mission had a great many restaurants, yet its residents weren't protesting. 24th Street in Noe Valley had fewer restaurants and cafes, but some vociferous neighbors believed there were far too many.

In lengthy team meetings in cubbyhole offices at 450 McAllister Street we parsed the survey results and tried to define a balanced neighborhood commercial street, considering issues like: the consumer catchment basin; age and size; surrounding demographics; history; and, most of all, the degree of citizen uproar. Our study, released first in the spring of 1984, proposed increasing the number of types of commercial districts, and recommended fifteen new individual commercial districts where interim zoning measures would address neighborhood concerns. On 24th Street in Noe Valley, for example, an overabundance of eating and drinking establishments would be regulated through special review for any new business. As stated in the report, "once the percentage of commercially-used frontage occupied by eating and drinking establishments reached 25

Mitchell Schwarzer is Professor of Visual Studies at California College of the Arts, San Francisco and Oakland. He has written widely on Northern California architecture.

For much of its brief history the city has been subject to conflicts between proponents for large-scale plans and opposition against them, between blueprints for the city as a whole and ideas stemming from narrower interests.

percent, no additional uses of this nature would be permitted.”

I remember tying myself into knots over the definition of a “traditional mix of uses” and over the means by which we hoped to achieve that result. As I saw the matter, retail commerce by nature opposed tradition, introducing change and novelty — new products, new stores, new types of business — to stimulate sales. Speaking with Robin Jones one day, I blurted out that I didn’t go to planning school to ensure that some NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) residents wouldn’t have to compete with restaurant-goers for street parking — a major source of complaint. I referred to the larger goals of city planning to mediate between the marketplace and public good. Robin listened and then cut me off with one word — iterative. “What we do here,” she said, “is respond to complaints and critiques from citizens, neighborhood groups and other players in municipal government. We don’t start with ideals. We work within an existing planning process.” Later that day, a few years before I left the field of city planning, I discussed the word “iterative” with some friends and realized it meant repetition.

It turns out that my experiences as a city planner in San Francisco reveal a larger phenomenon. For much of its brief history the city has been subject to conflicts between proponents for large-scale plans and opposition against them, between blueprints for the city as a whole and ideas stemming from narrower interests. Such conflicts killed Daniel Burnham’s ambitious urban design plan in 1906. Then it was the fault of individual businesses. In recent times, it’s been individual citizens. By the late 1970s, the era of post-war activist planning morphed into an epoch of activist opposition and iterative planning. Alongside tax cuts and government spending cuts, bold civic or infrastructural plans became part of San Francisco’s past. The exhibition at SPUR, “Agents of Change: Civic Idealism and the Making of San Francisco” examines a number of proposals to improve the urban environment since Gold Rush times. In various eras—the freewheeling commercial city of the 19th century, the City Beautiful Movement, the Regionalist Arts and Crafts Movement, Modernism, Postmodernism and the contemporary turn toward the environment—the development of San Francisco has been propelled, yet often thwarted by the difficulty we have in coming together around a collective urban vision.

For each great project that went forward, like John McLaren’s arboreal sculpting of Golden Gate Park out of sand dunes, there are those stopped dead in their tracks, like Willis Polk’s Beaux Arts

Plan to make a grand public gateway out of the jumble of transit lines in front of the Ferry Building. Because collective visions are so hard to agree on San Francisco has sometimes clung to outmoded ones, epitomized by the ongoing expansion of Civic Center decades after the idea lost validity and the district had proven time and again to be devoid of urban life. And then there’s the UCSF campus at Mission Bay, a case study of how to over-plan an idea into bureaucratic anywhere-ness.

Of course, San Francisco’s history, location and environment have long encouraged, indeed demanded big moves. Because the city sits alongside the finest natural port on the West Coast, large swathes of land were sequestered by the government from the 1840s through the 1940s for defense, resulting in the massive military bases at the Presidio and Hunter’s Point. Because of its peninsular location, massive efforts were needed to link San Francisco to the rest of the country: from the ferry systems that connected with the transcontinental railroad to the bridges across the Bay and Golden Gate to the BART system to the international airport some ways south of the city. Because of the drought Mediterranean climate, water supplies are precarious and San Francisco carved up huge watersheds on the peninsula and laid tunnels and pipes hundreds of miles in order to transport the precious liquid from as far as the glorious (and destroyed) Hetch Hetchy Valley in the Sierra Nevada.

Often, however, certain large-scale plans masqueraded public benefits for personal gain or ideological shortsightedness: those mid-century urban renewal schemes at the Produce District and South of Market to evict “blighted” uses in favor of upscale development; the vast network of freeways proposed by the State during the 1950s which ignored the reality that tiny San Francisco couldn’t be treated like vast Los Angeles.

No wonder the recent reaction against visionary planning. San Francisco has long thought of itself as an assemblage of diverse individuals. The city exploded into existence during the Gold Rush, when thousands of entrepreneurs from all over the world descended and famously crafted a culture of instant wealth and remarkable religious and ethnic tolerance. For a long time, the pursuit of wealth and happiness precluded civic visions — hence the historical absence of a world-quality newspaper, library, or art museum. San Francisco also attracted seekers and nonconformists — the romantics, artists, beatniks, revolutionaries, hippies, hipsters, computer nerds and activists that fill the city’s apartments each generation. Many of them turned their energies against big plans. John Muir and

By looking back critically at the era long lambasted by neighborhood and preservation activists, we might learn from its moments of blunt thoughtlessness and yet be inspired by its systematic spirit to work toward a sensible, sustainable and stunning urban vision of our own.

the late 19th-century struggle to save the Sierras and their forests dovetails into the battle of four women who fought to Save the Bay in the 1960s. San Francisco's famous neighborhood groups were themselves forged in struggle, first battling freeways and later turning their ire against urban renewal and the "Manhattanization" of downtown.

By the 1980s, the very notion of change itself landed on the chopping block. Activists who had fought the Vietnam War, nuclear power and DDT, began opposing just about any transformation to their beloved city. Disenchanted with the political direction taken by much of the country after the Reagan Revolution, the activists fought chain stores, big box stores (even those that offered hardware goods like Home Depot), skyscrapers, contemporary architecture, increased density and, you guessed it, streets filled with cafes and restaurants.

The very people who had tramped around Europe in the postwar decades, who had become enamored with fine cuisine and strong coffee, were now supporting bans on eating and drinking establishments because they supposedly upset San Francisco's "traditional mix of uses." In this politically left-wing city you hear folks grumbling all the time that some new business or building doesn't fit in because it isn't in keeping with tradition.

What might lie ahead? Since the descent of San Francisco planning into iteration was catalyzed by the 1970s reaction to modernist urbanism, it's my belief that any renaissance of planning must confront modernism's successes and failures. At its worst moments, modernism had a way of steamrolling everything in its path and of the past and showing no regard for the preservation of older buildings with architectural or historical significance. But at its best moments, modernism rigorously and originally reworked the complexities of urban space, form, and living, bringing together what was happening locally with international economic, social and technological currents. Today, in the midst of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression and facing the catastrophic specter of global warming, bold moves are needed once more. I'm not advocating that we pick up where mid-century modernism left off. Rather, by looking back critically at the era long lambasted by neighborhood and preservation activists, we might learn from its moments of blunt thoughtlessness and yet be inspired by its systematic spirit to work toward a sensible, sustainable and stunning urban vision of our own. Who knows, maybe the folks in Noe Valley will wake up and start to see far beyond their fears of streets with no parking spaces. *

Progress intentionally planned: Telesis and the Modernist agenda

Peter Allen is an urban historian, and a Ph.D. candidate at the UC Berkeley College of Environmental Design.

The Telesis exhibit of 1940, “A Space for Living,” was a seminal event in the history of city planning in the Bay Area. At the time, San Francisco was one of the few major US cities without an independent professional city planning department. Planning ideas were dispersed among smaller agencies and neighborhood institutions, and the public had little understanding of the city planning profession. The Telesis exhibit would help change all this, making the argument for strong, centralized planning, as reflected in the definition of the group’s name: “progress intelligently planned and directed.”¹

The show opened at the San Francisco Museum of Art on June 29, 1940. Over the next several months, the exhibit brought in over 10,000 San Francisco residents to view the promise of comprehensive urban planning (Figures 1-2). Almost all Bay Area civic leaders and governmental players attended the exhibit. The enthusiasm soon led to the creation of a planning department in 1942, with Telesis members as its first staff members. After the short, ineffective tenure of L. Deming Tilton as the first City Planning Director, Telesis founder T.J. Kent would take over and craft San Francisco’s first general urban plan.

The exhibit also inspired the San Francisco Housing Association to expand from housing reform advocacy to a group concerned with city planning overall, renaming itself the San Francisco Planning and Housing Association, which in turn, became SPUR.

THE TELESIS MEMBERSHIP

Telesis members were, for the most part, young architects or landscape architects, and perhaps the first generation of native Bay Area designers. Each had adopted a broader concern for social problems during the depression and the New Deal, and turned to planning to solve urban social problems. Perhaps the key image of the group’s beginnings is when Jack Kent and Violich set out in 1939 to gather donations for the Space for Living exhibit, and their first stop was the home of Dorothy Erskine on Telegraph Hill. The meeting brought together two founding members of the group, and the key person that would help their group reach a

larger, more significant audience.

The programs of the New Deal, and the contacts made there, played a critical role in the evolution of Telesis. Kent took his first planning job at the Berkeley regional office of the National Resources Planning Board. Violich joined the New Deal’s Farm Security Administration, a program to provide housing to migrant workers and dust bowl refugees. At the FSA, Violich united with Vernon DeMars and Garret Eckbo. Eckbo’s work at the FSA and involvement with Telesis led him to recognize the “importance of social issues in landscape design.”² (Figure 3) DeMars, who would go on to be one of the Bay Area’s most important postwar architects, also spent time at the Rural Resettlement Agency, where he met Corwin Mocine and brought him into Telesis. Mocine was a landscape architect, but Telesis turned him into a life-long planner.

Meanwhile, at the NRPB, Kent met Mellier (Mel) Scott, a journalist turned planner, and his wife Geraldine, a landscape architect. The connections with Telesis convinced Mel that, “housing was only one aspect of the urban environment and that planning was much more important.”³ The couple was so impressed by Telesis they started a Los Angeles branch and put on another exhibit, “Now We Plan,” before they returned to the Bay Area for the rest of their careers.⁴

These, then, were the main founders of Telesis. By the summer of 1939 all were in the Bay Area and all shared an interest in finding new solutions to urban problems. They began meeting in various members’ apartments or architecture studios in the North Beach area. Their membership quickly swelled to 40 at the time of the exhibition, and over 100 thereafter. Numerous other design professionals were regular members or contributors, including William Wurster and Catherine Bauer. The most important long-term collaborator, however, was Kent and Violich’s first supporter from 1939: Dorothy Erskine. Along with her husband Morse, Erskine was a leader in the San Francisco Housing Association. Erskine was a grass-roots catalyst, using her network of social and political connections to push for urban planning and renewal, before emerging as one of the Bay Area’s most important environmentalists.

¹ Fran Violich, “Notes from a Telesis Study: Environmental Design and Planning in the San Francisco Bay Region 1939-1953” (November 1976), 4.

² Garrett Eckbo, “Handwritten Notes,” in Garret Eckbo Archives, Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley.

³ Mel Scott, “Telesis: Promoting Good Design.”

⁴ On the Los Angeles exhibit, see “Dream City,” *Time Magazine*, Nov. 10, 1941; “Now We Plan,” *California Arts and Architecture* (Nov. 1941), 17-21.

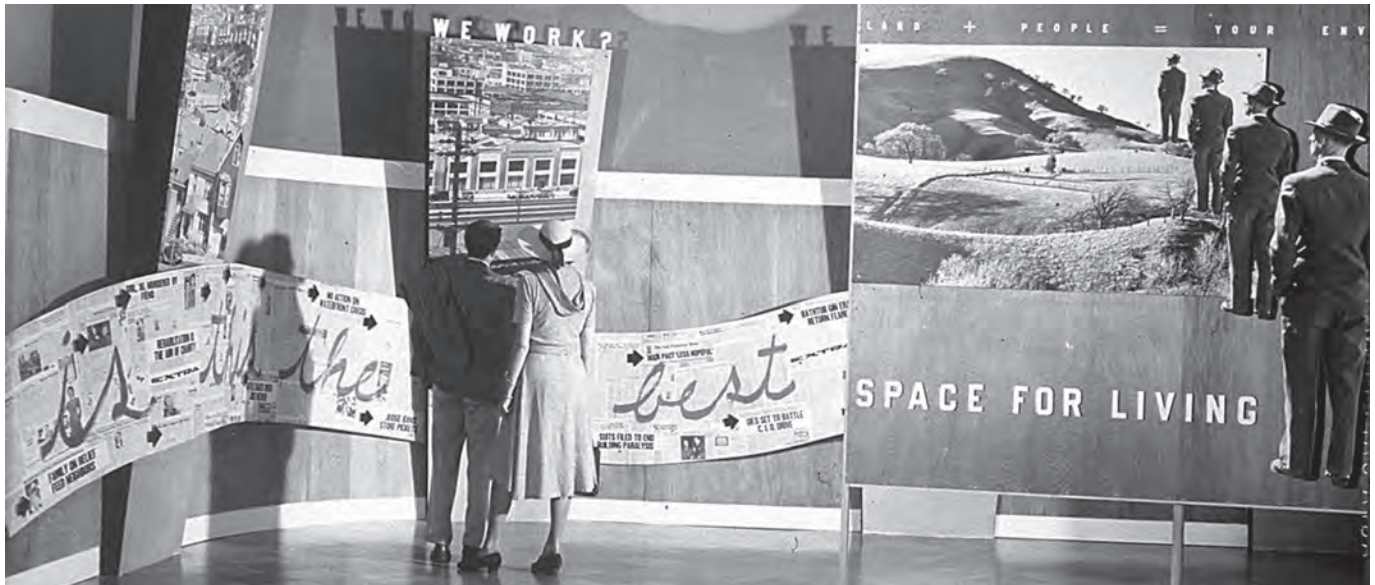
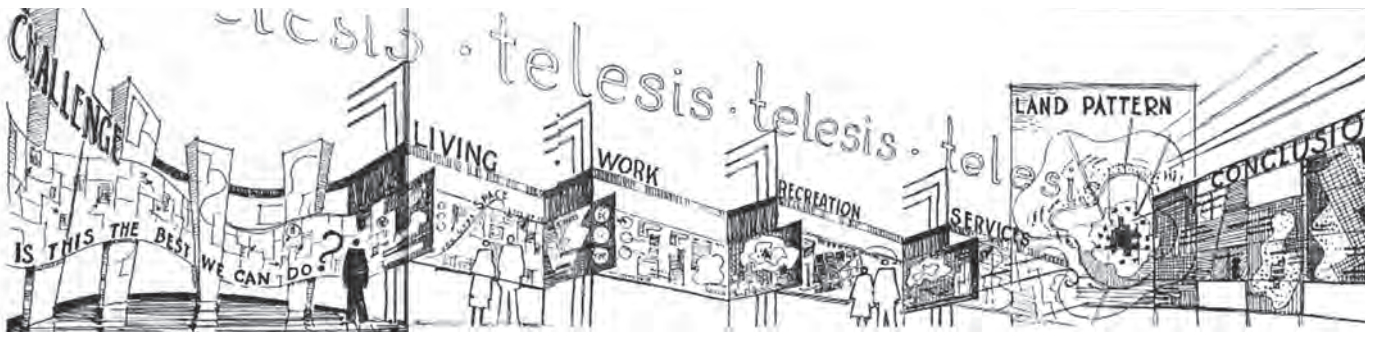
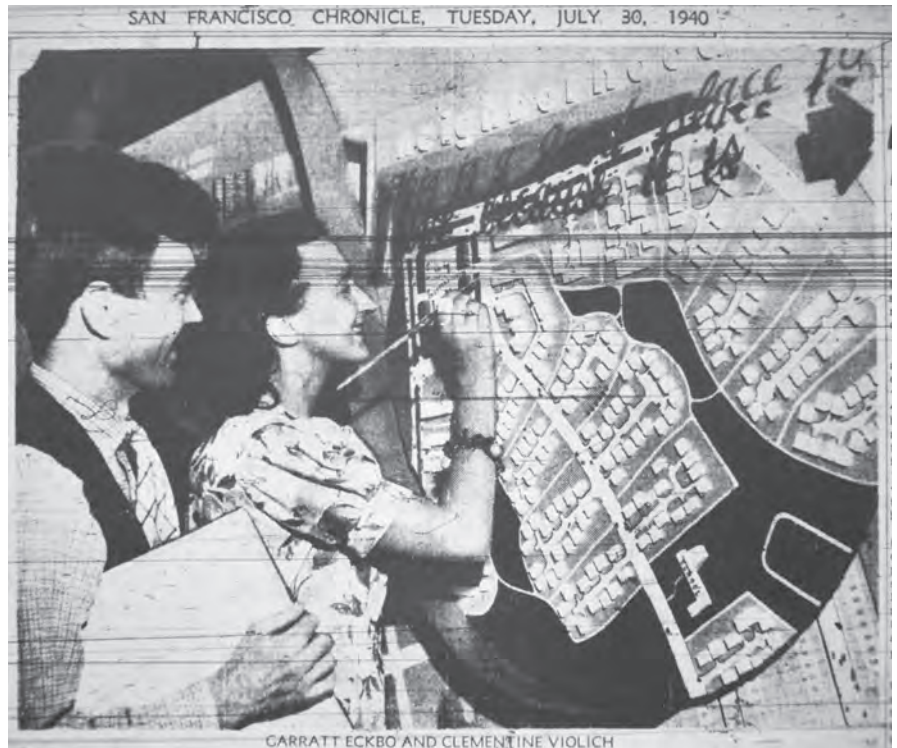
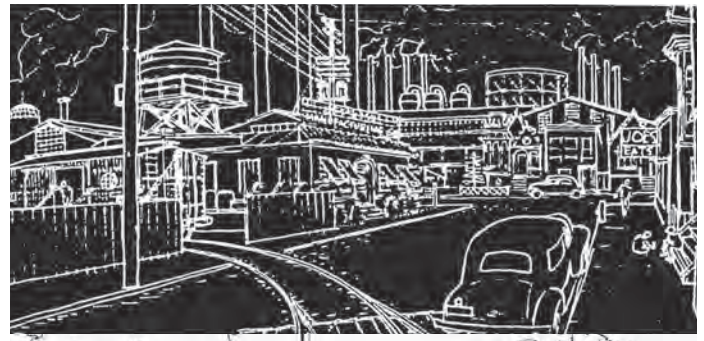


Figure 1 (top): Sketch of Telesis Exhibit by John Dinwiddie; Figure 2 (middle): Entry to the "A Space for Living" show. Fran Violich Collection, Visual Resources Center, College of Environmental Design, UC Berkeley; Figure 3 (bottom): Eckbo and Clementine Violich work on the 1940 Space for Living Exhibit. San Francisco Chronicle, July 30, 1940.





Living environment (top) as it was in 1940, and "as it should be."

Working environment (top) as it was in 1940, and "as it should be."

Figures 4 and 5: Sketches by Vernon DeMars for the 1940 exhibition contrast current blight with modern architecture and urban design.) A Space for Living Show. Fran Violich Collection, Visual Resources Center, College of Environmental Design, UC Berkeley.

Erskine immediately used her important connections to make an impact for Telesis and ensured that many San Francisco political leaders attended the 1940 exhibit, and linked them to future financial and professional supporters.

TELESIS AND URBAN RENEWAL

The Space for Living exhibit presented architectural ideas such as the superblock, firmly grounded in the ideas of le Corbusier and the Congress of International Modernism. In their first exhibit, Telesis declared that the “neighborhood unit and super-block treatment will lend economic stability and safer, richer, living.”⁵ Sketches by DeMars at the exhibit drew a sharp visual distinction between images of “urban blight,” and the clarity and order of the modernist designs that could replace them. (Figures 4-5).

In 1947, T. J. Kent hired Mel Scott to prepare a report exploring the possibilities of urban redevelopment in the racially mixed neighborhood of the Western Addition. The report advocated that the San Francisco Board of Supervisors designate the Western Addition as a “redevelopment area,” and establish a San Francisco Redevelopment Agency. In the report, Scott wrote of “wide stretches of urban blight are breeding grounds for crime and delinquency, cancerous growths that threaten the vitality of the city.”⁶ (Figure 6) Kent, Violich, and DeMars, along with other Telesis members all went on to play a role in the Western Addition redevelopment, though by the 1950s they had

moved on and were largely no longer involved.

Years later, Kent would note in a speech reviewing the history of Telesis that the solutions for public housing that Telesis had advocated did not prove to be good solutions, and they had never solved the slum housing issue. As Kent later described it, the eventual exposure of the “fatal, anti-social flaws in central-city redevelopment programs” revealed their own “professional shortcomings.”⁷

THE GREENBELT AND REGIONAL PLANNING

While urban renewal represents the darker realization of the Telesis philosophy, the fight to preserve open space, though also only accomplished only in fragments, remains a brighter achievement. It is important to note, however, that Telesis saw urban renewal and preserving open space as related urban problems. To stop suburban expansion and save the open space, downtown must be saved. The same vision that brought urban renewal to the region’s dense urban populations of minorities, also sought to protect the region’s rural open space, all while ignoring the creation of the region’s spaces of intense pollution concentrated in other minority neighborhoods.

The Telesis 1940 exhibit asked: “The medieval city could have a greenbelt, why not the modern metropolis?” Open spaces, Telesis argued, were being threatened by “a new kind of urban growth.” The exhibit argued for a large part of the city to

⁵ “Telesis: The Group and the First Exhibit, 1940,” in T.J. Kent Archives, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

⁶ Mel Scott, “Western Addition District,” 3.

⁷ T.J. Kent, “A History of the Department of City and Regional Planning,” in Lowney and D. Landis, Fifty Years of City and Regional Planning at UC Berkeley, 3.



Figure 6: Cover of Mel Scott's *New City: San Francisco Redeveloped*, showing the Western Addition Redevelopment zone.

You get a view of tomorrow from this San Francisco apartment. From the balcony you can see the island-studded bay, the four silver towers of the Bay Bridge, the precipitous streets of Nob Hill and Russian Hill, the wooded mane of Buena Vista Park, all the familiar landmarks, but beneath your balcony lies a new San Francisco, a city that fulfills the promise of its incomparable site.

It is a green city. Broad lawns, trees, flowers, ample terraces form a setting for your ten-story apartment house. You look down on tree-lined walks and attractive spots for relaxation. One of the walks leads to a recreation area in which there are tennis and badminton courts, inviting you to join the neighbors in a brisk game next Saturday afternoon.

be dedicated to open green spaces for the health of urban citizens: "Why not bring the agricultural greenbelt to the rescue of our cities."⁸ Moreover the group argued that open spaces and the greenbelt would serve to control urban sprawl, funneling it into denser, compact cities and towns.

By the mid-twentieth century, a majority of citizens lived within metropolitan regions, but these regions were greatly fragmented among various governments. In the Bay Area of the 1940s, this had resulted in over 100 local governments making separate land use decisions. While the functions of daily urban life increasingly took place across the metropolitan region, government functions were organized as if each city were an isolated and sovereign island. Anticipating the calls of Bay Area environmentalists and progressive planners in the postwar period, Telesis argued that a regional

planning agency was the only true solution for planning urban growth, preserving greenbelts, and solving regional transportation issues.

The 1940 exhibition tied the founding of Telesis to the need for regional government, writing that because the lack of strong regional government "exists in our region," we "young men and women in the related professions of architecture, city and regional planning, landscape architecture and industrial design, have come together and formed this group — Telesis."⁹ Through the regional agency, Telesis aimed to guide "the vast upcoming development toward fresh environmental patterns," to "organize growth so it would not destroy the integrity of Bay Area cities."¹⁰ (Figure 7)

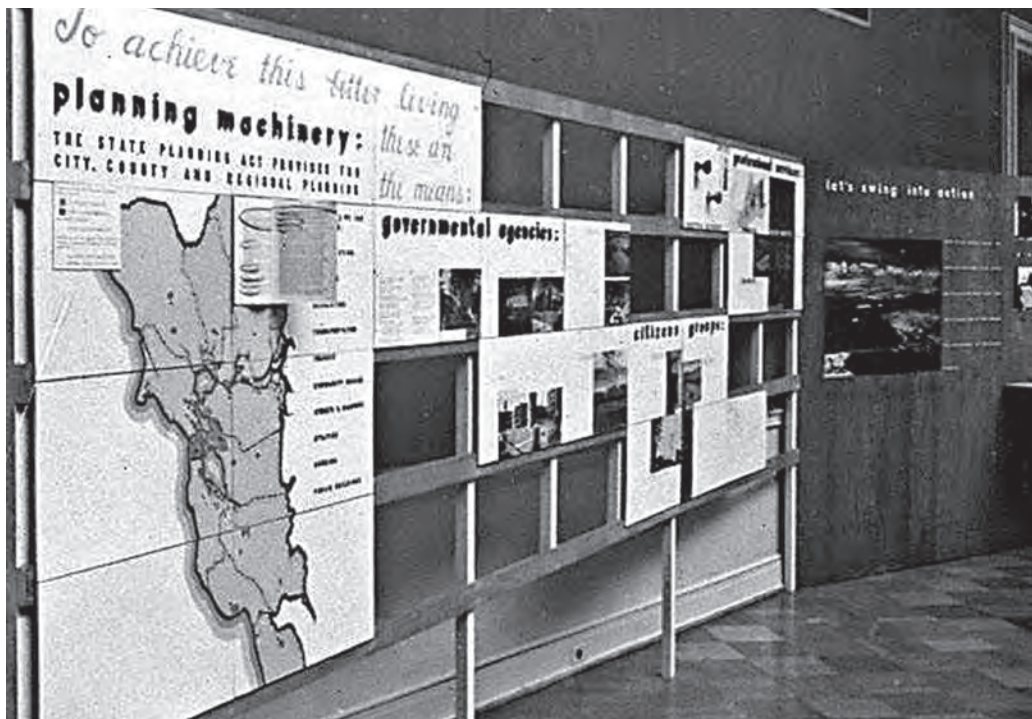
In 1941, Telesis was already work on a Bay Area Regional Planning Commission Proposal, and a second exhibit of 1941 entitled "Regional Planning

⁸ "Telesis: The Group and the First Exhibit, 1940," T.J. Kent Archives, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. See also, Corwin Mocine, "Planning for the region, in California Arts and Architecture (April 1941).

⁹ "Telesis: The Group and the First Exhibit, 1940," T.J. Kent Archives.

¹⁰ T.J. Kent, quoted in Violich, "The Planning Pioneers," 34.

Figure 7: Regional Planning demonstrated at the 1940 exhibit, "A Space for Living" show. Fran Violich Collection, Visual Resources Center, College of Environmental Design, UC Berkeley.



for the Next Million People,” was intended to show regular citizens all the regional activities they engaged in during their daily lives, and connect that to the need for regional planning. Corwin Mocine brought the Telesis position for regional planning to the pages of *California Arts and Architecture* in 1941. Grasping the kernel of a problem that has plagued planners for over half-a-century now, Mocine wrote that while the increased use of the private automobile sapped support for rail transportation, it soon created highways so congested that people would turn back to rapid transit, only to find that due to lack of support, that service was now inadequate. “We,” Mocine wrote, “find ourselves caught in a chain of circumstances that grows steadily more costly.”¹¹

THE CONTINUED LEGACY OF TELESIS

Telesis would continue to advocate for regional planning in their 1950 exhibit, “The Next Million People,” at San Francisco Museum of Art, which would be their last. World War II and the drastic increase in the Bay Area’s defense industries had dramatically changed the region, bringing tremendous growth. Telesis members were absorbed into the mainstream of the increasing professionalized planning environment, taking jobs in planning departments or teaching in Berkeley’s Department of City and Regional Planning, founded under the leadership of Telesis members.

While Telesis members abandoned urban

renewal advocacy, they continued to fight for regional planning and the urban greenbelt. Kent, along with Dorothy Erksine, founded the Citizens for Regional Parks and Open Space, the first open-space advocacy group in the area, which evolved into People for Open Space, and into today’s Greenbelt Alliance. Kent and his group played a large role in steering the regional agency that did emerge, the Association of Bay Area Governments, into a defender of greenbelts. Likewise, under prodding from Erskine, Scott published in 1963 his study, *The Future of San Francisco Bay*, which described in horrifying terms for the Bay Area public the potential diminishing of the Bay through landfill and shoreline development. The book provided the foundation for civic activism that the Save the Bay trio of Catherine Kerr, Esther Gulick and Sylvia McLaughlin used to pass the legislation creating the Bay Area Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC), the agency that has protected the Bay ever since.

The Telesis 1940 exhibit shows that we have been arguing against sprawl and proposing smart growth as a solution for over 60 years. Yet still the debate goes on, centered on the same issues and proposing the same solutions, while continuing to ignore the implicit questions of race and the unequal geography of environmental protection. The Telesis vision of 1940 was one never fully adopted, but its partial realization underscores some of the Bay Area’s most troubled — and most loved — urban spaces. ✨

¹¹ Corwin Mocine, “Planning for the Region,” *California Arts and Architecture*, (April 1941), 23.

Reflections on preservation: How the past became the future

In 1958 when John Woodbridge and I arrived in San Francisco from the east coast, architectural preservation was limited to buildings of the Hispanic colonial era and the Gold Rush. Influenced by Modernism, the younger generation of architects dismissed buildings of the late Victorian period as the fanciful ornament known as “gingerbread”.

We wanted to see the houses designed by William Wurster, Gardner Daily and others, which had appeared in the architectural magazines. But where were they? There were no guides, and even if the houses had been published, their locations were not given.

We learned that Wurster’s office had made a map showing its work and that of other architects. With a worn copy of the map — it was printed on blueprint paper and wasn’t easy to read — we explored the Bay Area’s modern buildings with enthusiasm. We entertained the thought of writing a guidebook to Bay Area architecture for others like ourselves.

When planning began for the 1960 AIA convention, we were asked to create a guide for the attendees. The three members of the AIA committee who reviewed our selection of buildings were William Wurster, who was also Dean of the UC Berkeley Department of Architecture, Ernest Born, a faculty member and Elizabeth Thompson, an architectural journalist. In general, they approved of our selections, but they drew the line at extending the range of historic buildings to include stands of the exuberant late 19th century houses we had come to appreciate. What was later celebrated as San Francisco’s “painted ladies” was considered tawdry and best left out of print.

Although previous conventions gave out printed pamphlets and maps of their architectural attractions, these were not sold in bookstores. Since our little \$1.95 book, *Buildings of the Bay Area*, was the first nationally published architectural guidebook, it could be sold — theoretically. But the local bookstores didn’t know where to display the book. At Stacy’s in downtown San Francisco the guidebook was shelved with engineering textbooks in the back of the store. We never knew if any copies were sold.

Around this time the preservation movement was sparked by the loss of major historical buildings. Two examples follow:

If ever a building had such significance that it was certain to be preserved, it was the Montgomery Block, which stood on the southeast corner of the intersection of Montgomery and Washington Streets where the Transamerica Building now stands. Montgomery Street was then at the edge of the Bay.

Erected in 1853 by Henry Wager Halleck, the four-story Montgomery Block, designed in a restrained Classical style, had 28 ground-floor commercial spaces and 150 offices on the upper floors. The innovative part of the building, a huge raft of lattice-laid redwood logs, was designed by Halleck, who had studied civil engineering at West Point. Bolted together in an excavated basement, the raft foundation permitted the building to float as a unit during an earthquake rather than breaking apart. This strategy was validated when the building survived the 1906 earthquake undamaged.

The lawyers and financiers who were the building’s original tenants left when the financial world moved south on Montgomery. They were succeeded by actors, artists and writers, among them Jack London, George Sterling, Lola Montez and Mark Twain. Called “The Monkey Block,” the building was an important bohemian center from the 1890s to the 1940s. But in the post-World War II decade its population declined along with its appearance and status so that when the land greatly increased in value, its demolition was proposed.

Although preservation had gained an audience, it was small and not organized to oppose a huge real estate investment. The Montgomery Block was demolished in 1959 and replaced by the Transamerica Building, which is now a city icon but lacks the level of cultural history the Montgomery Block accumulated.

Another early battle the fledgling preservationists lost was over the Murphy family house in Sunnyvale. The city wanted the land for a park and opposed spending money to preserve the house, which was perceived to be a “white elephant.”

Sally B. Woodbridge is a writer, critic and architectural historian based in Berkeley, California.

Martin Murphy and members of his family and friends traveled across the continent in 1844 and became ranchers in the Sacramento valley and the southern part of the San Francisco peninsula where they founded Sunnyvale. The family house was carefully designed, but since there were no sawmills near Sunnyvale, the house was framed according to specifications in Bangor, Maine, and then shipped in sections around Cape Horn to Sunnyvale where it was erected around 1850. As with other wooden buildings of the times, the structure was held together with wooden pegs and leather straps instead of nails.

Although the Murphy house was a California State Historical Landmark and arguably as significant as the houses of other early settlers, its demolition by the City of Sunnyvale in 1961 met with little opposition. Yet, evidence of the growth of the preservation movement in succeeding decades can be seen in the creation of the Sunnyvale Historical Museum, opened in September 2008, which celebrates the contributions of the Murphy family. A replica of the Murphy House was built on an adjacent property as a kind of apology for the destruction of the most important surviving artifact of the city's pioneering past.

Although the demolition of buildings of architectural and historic value had begun to energize preservationists, urban renewal was the real catalyst for the movement. When Justin Herman became the director of the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency in 1959, his political and administrative skills transformed the previously unremarkable agency into a virtual bulldozer of the city's underprivileged neighborhoods.

While urban renewal held sway from the 1960s to the mid-1970s, its visible effects empowered the preservation movement. In 1976 the celebration of the country's Bi-Centennial directed public attention to the past and its vanishing treasures.

As neighborhood populations were dislocated and their buildings razed urban renewal became known as urban removal. The Golden Gateway replaced the produce district near The Embarcadero between Jackson and Clay Streets, the Yerba Buena redevelopment area south of Market Street removed blocks of small hotels and boarding houses along with their blue collar residents, and the Western Addition Areas 1 and 2 demolished the late 19th century houses occupied by the African-American population that replaced the Japanese-Americans who had been relocated from their homes and businesses during World War II.

Finally, the public outrage over this indiscriminant destruction and social injustice grew so strong that the demolition of buildings in the Western Addition's A-2 area, which surrounded the newly built core of housing and commercial buildings occupied by the re-located Japanese-Americans, was delayed and then discontinued. The hiatus allowed a group of volunteers organized by Augustan Keane, a lawyer who lived in Alameda but had his office in San Francisco, to survey the A-2 area. Our group walked the blocks of late 19th century buildings, wrote descriptions of them and took photographs. We then turned the survey results over to the Redevelopment Agency for what we hoped would be a reconsideration of the plans for the A-2 area. A formal acknowledgment of our work was all we received. Still, the demolition ended, and in the 1970s and 1980s the so-called Victorian style was rehabilitated to become the city's pride and joy. The Redevelopment Agency even sent us a commendation for our efforts in the 1980s.

The movement grew. In the 20th century's closing decades, the past became the future.

In 1979 I was appointed to the California State Historical Resources Commission and served as its architectural historian until 1984. The commission met four times a year to review applications for nominations of buildings and historic districts to the National Register of Historic Places.

As we toured the state and listened to the people who attended our meetings and spoke in favor or against the various designations, it became apparent to me that in both large and small cities many of the advocates for the creation of historic districts in their downtowns were not so motivated by the architectural significance of the district's buildings as by the threat to the familiar built environment by proposed new development. Justifications for registering ordinary buildings became more elaborate and often linked to the accumulation of history rather than whether the buildings retained the appearance of their time. In other words the debt to the past began to weigh more than the promise of the future.

Where are we now? With the bursting of the latest financial bubble, the absence of development has brought awareness of how much our economy depends on it to provide jobs. Since the recession has lowered the pressure on both sides of the development/preservation equation, this time of inactivity could be devoted to the kind of even-handed planning that would mitigate future battles by evaluating the benefits of both. *

City of plans (City of experiences) in history

Being human is itself difficult, and therefore all kinds of settlements (except dream cities) have problems. Big cities have difficulties in abundance, because they have people in abundance. But vital cities are not helpless to combat even the most difficult of problems. They are not passive victims of chains of circumstances, any more than they are a malignant opposite of nature.

— Jane Jacobs¹

As I sit down to write this essay, an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* reports on recent legislation championed by former Supervisor Aaron Peskin intended to make it easier to designate historic landmarks and districts. The columnist C. V. Nevius, who loves nothing better than a

good contradiction, writes, “it is the latest chapter in that old San Francisco debate — do we want to freeze every structure in the city in time and never allow a developer to build anything new, or do we need to accept the fact that every bay window isn’t a work of art?”¹

The question of how we hold on to the best of a city — architecturally, historically, as a matter of quality of the urban experience and quality of life — is deeply bound to the question of how cities change, and in particular the tension between “preservation” and “development.” It may seem easier to recognize what is good about a city after it has withstood some test of time — to mourn its passing if it fell under the wrecking ball (as whole swaths of San Francisco neighborhoods

Jeannene Przyblyski is an artist, historian and professor at the San Francisco Art Institute.

Thanks to Amy Ress for her help in researching this article.

¹ *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Modern Library, 1961), p. 447.

South Park on Rincon Hill began as the upscale neighborhood for the wealthy San Franciscans. When the Pacific Heights neighborhood blossomed, the upper class moved west and notions of an elegant South Park left with them.



One Rincon may turn out to be a relic of the Rincon Hill revival plan as the only skyscraper of the bunch to be built pre-economic bust.



have done), or to marvel at particularly tenacious examples of survival (one of my special favorites is Klockar's Blacksmith Shop on Rincon Hill). Development, too, impacts architectural quality, quality of experience, quality of life, and capacity to attain historical significance, and is intended to do so with foresight rather than in hindsight when channeled through initiatives to plan and manage change in the city according to current thinking on what, exactly, makes a "great city."

But here's the rub: few of the qualities that make a great city are easy to define, nor is it particularly easy to obtain consensus around them. Many of these qualities are subject to prevailing fashion, especially when the nexus between visionary master planning, development energy and new technology (whether cars or computers) is especially strong. Ideas about "livability" and "quality of life," never mind architectural or design quality, are all pretty subjective and deeply inflected by who you are and where you see yourself in the economic and cultural pecking order. Nevius goes on to report that Peskin's proposed legislation seems destined to pit middle-aged white preservation enthusiasts against "young, disadvantaged people of color who are trying to carve out a life in the city."

But that's just one set of perceived dichotomies, and reflects one set of perceptions about whose development or preservation initiative comes at whose expense? For whom is housing preserved or developed: empty nesters or extended families? How about recreational space? Does the city need more meandering promenades for solitary strolling and biking, or more picnic tables and soccer fields? Do human-scale gingerbread Victorians appeal to your sense of a cosy urban domesticity, or does a spare and soaring modernist architecture affirm your commitment to urban vitality and the promise of an urban future?

Typically, most comprehensive planning, like most grand narratives about cities, starts with the bird's eye perspective or overview, which tends to smooth out the contradictions of life on the ground. But for me, it's at street-level, where all the crooked edges of individual initiatives and just life-in-general align and misalign with successive generations of administrative and prescriptive zoning, urban design plans and other measures, that a city is most particularly itself and most interesting. Here are just a few places in San Francisco where it's worth walking around to see for yourself how ideas and plans about what a city has been, is, and might be are being put to the test of everyday experience.

LANDS END

Indeed, although in my travels I saw very good sites and beautiful country, I saw none which pleased me so much as this. And I think that if it could be well settled like Europe there would not be anything more beautiful in all the world, for it has the best advantages for founding in it a most beautiful city, with all the conveniences desired, by land as well as by sea, with that harbor so remarkable and so spacious, in which may be established shipyards, docks, and anything that might be wished.

— Fray Pedro Font²

When the Anza expedition was dispatched by the Spanish colonial government in Mexico to open up a land route to Alta California, they basically came up northbound 280. What's more, they made their way from native American village to village, bartering small goods for food and directions. When they reached what would become San Francisco in 1776, the 240 "settlers" doubled the non-native population of the region. Meanwhile, the native population stood at well over 300,000. The northwestern edge of the peninsula was a favorite place of the Ohlone. A freshwater

² Herbert, Eugene Bolton, *Font's Complete Diary: a Chronicle of the Founding of San Francisco* (University of California, 1933), p. 341 (March 27, 1776). For more on this area, see the excellent website at www.pier70sf.org (accessed May 3, 2009).

spring made a good place for an encampment, and a midden still stands to prove the abundance of shellfish and game.

Since then, “Lands End” has been the site of pleasure grounds and railroads, military fortifications and forestation efforts (first under the Works Progress Administration and now under the National Park Service and Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy). It has seen shipwrecks and trainwrecks, love stories and tragedies. Recently Lands End has been refurbished to provide a newly elegant urban promenade along this particularly wild stretch of coastline. If you stand where you can look across the Bay to the Marin Headlands, you can see what San Francisco looked like when Father Font arrived (it was mostly tree-less, coastal scrub dunes and hills), even as the San Francisco he imagined is at your back. And standing there, you can think about what was gained and lost when this shining city came into being in what was already one of the most densely populated areas in North America even before the Europeans arrived on the scene.

DOGPATCH/CENTRAL WATERFRONT

The shipyards and docks that Father Font imagined came to life on the Central Waterfront, among other places, where they now stand mostly in ruins. Industry was a vital part of San Francisco’s history from the Gold Rush through World War II, and waves of newcomers worked in the cordage factory, steel rolling mills and shipbuilding yards, slept in boarding houses and shanties, and unwound in the saloons and bars where among other entertainments, boxing matches were offered to burn off steam. The old place names of the Central Waterfront carry their memory — present-day Dogpatch was known as Dutchman’s Flat (a few rows of working-class scaled Victorians survive on Tennessee and Minnesota Streets, their compact plainness a useful contrast to the more ornate Victorians the upwardly-mobile built in other parts of the City). The serpentine outcropping in the current PG&E yard at 22nd and Illinois is all that remains of “Irish Hill” (most of the rest of it was chipped away to infill Mission Bay).³

Heavy industry doesn’t seem to fit so well into San Francisco’s future. The ship repair business goes on, but most jobs in the area have transitioned to light industry or no industry at all. As the biotech campus of Mission Bay grows to the north, and the Third Street Light Rail wears a slow but inexorable groove of gentrification through the area, the question of what to do with historic Pier 70 remains. Urban ruins hold a certain fascination

in their own right (the Pier is a favorite site for guerilla-style installations by the graduate students of the San Francisco Art Institute whose studios are located in the nearby American Can building), but we will lose something essential about “what made San Francisco work” if we fail to address the potential of this area with imagination and resourcefulness.

CIVIC CENTER

Arthur Brown Jr.’s City Hall, opened in 1915, is San Francisco’s beaux-arts crown jewel and emblematic of the City Beautiful movement that held sway in city planning circles around the turn of the century. Beautifully restored under the administration of Mayor Willie L. Brown Jr. (although not without some predictable controversy over cost and Mayor Brown’s “imperial” tendencies), the interior provides a stately civic setting for the very public rough-and-tumble of San Francisco politics, and the very personal relationship of citizen to government, whether it be negotiated by casting a ballot, getting married or paying property taxes.

The same cannot be said of the grand plaza that fronts City Hall to the east. Its fortunes have waxed and waned with the decades, efforts to resolve its design in constant tension with more pressing needs and uses, whether it be space for a city festival or block party, temporary military barracks during World War II or symbolic homeless encampments during the economic downturn of the 1980s, let alone the excavation of the underground parking garage that disrupted its original beaux-arts plan. But here’s the thing: it’s the very unremarkableness of the plaza, anchored by the exceptional backdrop of City Hall’s soaring, gilded dome, that makes it such a flexible space for ongoing experiments in civic-mindedness, whether it be through the wide range of recent public art projects (everything from Burning Man to Patrick Dougherty), the installation of an organic “victory” garden to celebrate the contemporary ethos of sustainability or the construction of an experimental green building. Civic Center Plaza can be a laboratory for defining who we are and who we want to be precisely because it has defeated most efforts to make it precious and frozen in time — even as it stands in relation to one of our most deeply symbolic historic buildings.

RINCON HILL

Rincon Hill started out posh. South Park was developed as an English-style Hyde Park to be ringed with the 19th-century equivalent of McMansions. It never got finished as envisioned, and instead Rincon entered the long period of its

³ C. V. Nevius, “‘Historic Preservation’ Plan Won’t Save S.F.,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (April 30, 2009).



Irish Hill once housed the industrial working class of San Francisco, a residential neighborhood amongst the factories and shipyards. Few remnants of the Irish Hill neighborhood remain, let alone the hill itself (as seen here). Nowadays the area is called Mission Bay, and instead of ship builders, the biotech industry reigns.





(Top) Public artist Patrick Dougherty's installation in Civic Center Plaza demonstrates the Plaza's flexibility. Here, it acts as a stage for playful nest sculptures, but on another day it works equally well hosting political protests. (Bottom) Victory gardens of 1943, like the U.S. barracks that covered Civic Center Plaza during World War II, demonstrate the Plaza's function as a space of necessity.





Lands End has long been a treasured spot, dating back to large Native American settlements in the area. Here, a view of the Presidio and Marin Headlands in the distance in 1815.

“decline.” Mansions around South Park gave way to rooming houses and bodegas, the nearby Sailor’s Union of the Pacific functioned as job hall and hangout for merchant seaman (offering among other amenities a barbershop, bar and boxing ring), and anchored the “Battle of Rincon Hill” when workers confronted police during the 1934 waterfront strike. The various approaches to the Bay Bridge have brought periodic gridlock and little pockets of no man’s land. For a brief moment in the early nineties, South Park came back into prominence as the newly fashionable ground zero for the dot.com boom. With the bust, it slipped once again into benignly hip obscurity.

And then increasing demand for housing combined with new ideas about urban densification to focus new attention on Rincon. Putting towers on San Francisco hills was already somewhat of a tradition. The Rincon Hill Plan would transform the area’s spotty patchwork of aging, low-density housing, aging industrial buildings and aging infrastructure into a visionary new neighborhood of residential skyscrapers carefully spaced amongst pedestrian-friendly thoroughfares offering neighborhood-serving amenities. In 2007, the Chronicle declared that in five or maybe ten years, old San Franciscans wouldn’t recognize this part of town. Only one tower got built before the 2008 global economic meltdown put most plans on hold. For now, the 641-foot tall One Rincon stands alone on the south-of-Market skyline, serving as an accidental monument to an idea of city-building “Vancouver-style” that may have come a little too late to San Francisco, or at least a monument to San Francisco’s ongoing commitment to mixing a lively debate about the city’s future direction with a healthy skepticism about making any plans at all.

WHEREVER YOU MAY BE STANDING, RIGHT NOW

I began walking my own city’s streets as a teenager and walked them so long that both they and I changed, the desperate pacing of adolescence when the present seemed an eternal ordeal giving way to the musing walks and innumerable errands of someone no longer wound up so tight, so isolated, so poor, and my walks have now often become review of my own and the city’s history together. Vacant lots become new buildings, old geezer bars are taken over by young hipsters, the Castro’s discos become vitamin stores, whole streets and neighborhoods change their complexion. Even my own neighborhood has changed so much it sometimes seems as though I have moved two or three times from the raucous corner I started out on just before I turned twenty.

— Rebecca Solnit⁴

⁴Wanderlust: A History of Walking (Viking, 2000), p. 194.

The give and take between the old and new city doesn’t stop with these places. It can be found all around San Francisco, as much a product of individual narratives as of official histories, with as many starting points as there are new arrivals to the city, as many trajectories as there are human desires, as many missed opportunities as there are unfinished city plans, as many lucky breaks as any developer’s dream.

So...pick a place where you feel fully present and fully acknowledged in the City — maybe it’s your house or apartment, where you walk your dog or get your morning coffee or hang out after work; maybe it’s wheeling down the bike lane on Valencia, finding the first spring Clarkias blooming on Tank Hill, barbecuing in the Great Meadow at Golden Gate Park, marching in a protest down Market Street. Maybe it’s shopping at the Alemany Farmer’s Market or the one at the Ferry Building or Civic Center or Divisadero and Grove. Maybe it’s the alcove where you got married at City Hall. Think about the things worth saving about San Francisco, the things that need changing, the things that seem to change no matter what. Check back in three years. In five years. In ten years. And remember how the City’s history became your own. ✨



Why I gave to the Community Campaign for the SPUR Urban Center

Richard A. Sucre,
*Associate/Architectural Historian,
Page + Turnbull and proud urbanist*

“I love the neighborhoods and thrive on the vitality of cities! I gave because I believe in SPUR’s mission, and realize that the Urban Center is much needed in our community.”

We need your support to help us reach our \$18 million capital campaign goal. Please consider making your gift — of any amount — today! Call Sarah Sykes at 415.781.8726 x123 for more information.

Welcome to our new members!

INDIVIDUALS

Bernadine Adams
Harvey Allen
Alex Amoroso
Greg Andreas
William Andrews
David N. Arnav
Monica Arriola
Betsy Baum
Noah Beil
Terry Betterly
David Boesch
Geoff Bomba
Margaret Brodtkin
Darcy Brown
Shelly Brown
Erin Burg Hupp
Caitlin Cameron
Joe Castorena
Ryan Chamberlain
Claire Cheng
Zahen Chowdhury
Christopher Colvin
Mark Conrad
Kelly Corter Kelly
Holly Dabral
Raymond del Portillo
Todd Dell'Aquila
Earl Diskin
Dina Dobkin
Michael Eiseman
Kristine Enea
Vanessa Eng
Courtney Fink
Alison Fish
Cecilia Fisher
Michael Flaherman
William Fleissig
Kathryn Fowler
Nicole Franklin
Adrienne Frieden
Jessica Garcia
Marjorie Gelin
Rebecca Glyn
Gail Goldyne
Tommy Golen
Jawj Greenwald
Richard Gross
Penelope Grzebik
Kevin Hart
Julia Harter
Michael Hicks
Tina Hodgson
Josie Howard, M.D.
Justin Huang
David Hunt
Devyani Jain
Chris Jensen
Evelyn Johnson
Ellen Kaiser
Richard Kim
Kassin Laverty
Margaret Lee
Sonia Lehman-Frisch
Debra Lefler
John Leonard
Tim Leonoudakis
Jeremy Litz
Benjamin Lowe
Ann Lyons
Ian Maddison
Nolan Madson

Rachel Malchow
Yolanda Manzone
Jesse Martinez
Richard McDerby
Mark Miller
Megan Miller
Lena Miyamoto
Andre Morand
Mary L. Murphy
Francesca Napolitan
Bernard Niechlanski
Ruairi O'Connell
Paul O'Driscoll
Larry Orman
Brian Overland
Marcia Packlick
Matt Pagel
Caitheal A. Pearce
Katie Pethan
Karolina Pormanczuk
Carrie Portis
Leslie Pritchett
Adina Ringle
Cygridh Rooney
Peter Sahmel
Tanu Sankalia
Brian Sauer
Alisa Shen
Tatyana Sheyner
Steven Shum
Heidi Sieck
Benjamin Sisson
Robert Stevenson
William Strawn
Masako Martha Suzuki
Andy Szybalski
Starr Terrell
Julie Trachtenberg
Paul Travis
Scott Truitt
Derek Turner
Elaine Uang
Dennis Vermeulen
Rene Vignos
Willem Vroegh
Randy Waldeck
Brian Walker
Scott Walton
Tony Wan
Jayson Wechter
Lisa Weiner
Steve Wertheim
Julie Whitcomb
Christie White
Nicholas White
Ruby Woo
Dee Dee Workman
Robert Zirkle
Jennifer Zweig

BUSINESSES

Crescent Heights of America
Lockton Insurance Brokers, LLC
Mechanics Bank
Ryan Associates
Verizon Wireless
William McDonough + Partners

SPUR Board of Directors

Co-Chairs

Andy Barnes
Tom Hart

Executive Director

Gabriel Metcalf

Urban Center Director

Diane Filippi

Vice-Chairs

Lisa Feldstein
Linda Jo Fitz
Bob Gamble
Jim Salinas, Sr.
Libby Seifel
Lyida Tan

Treasurer

Terry Micheau

Secretary

Jean Fraser

Immediate Past Chair

Vince Hoenigman

Advisory Council Co-Chairs

Paul Sedway
Michael Wilmar

Board Members

Michael Alexander
Jim Andrew Jr.
David Baker
Fred Blackwell
Lee Blitch
Margo Bradish
Pamela Brewster
Laurence Burnett
Michaela Cassidy
Emilio Cruz
Charmaine Curtis
Gia Daniller
Kelly Dearman
Shelly Doran
Oz Erickson
Luisa Ezquerro
Linda Jo Fitz
Norman Fong
Frank Fudem
Gillian Gillet
Chris Gruwell
David Hartley
Laurie Johnson
Ken Kirkey
Travis Kiyota
Patricia Klitgaard
Richard Kunnath
Ellen Lou
Janis Mackenzie

John Madden
Jacinta McCann
Mary McCue
John McNulty
Chris Meany
Ezra Mersey
Peter Mezey
Leroy Morishita
Dick Morten
Tomiquia Moss
Mary Murphy
Paul Okamoto
Brad Paul
Tim Paulson
Chris Poland
Teresa Rea
Byron Rhett
Bill Rosetti
Victor Seeto
Chi-Hsin Shao
Raphael Sperry
Bill Stotler
Michael Teitz
Michael Theriault
James Tracy
Will Travis
Jeff Tumlin
Brooks Walker, III
Debra Walker
Paul Zeger

Chairs and committees

PROGRAM COMMITTEES

Ballot Analysis

Bob Gamble
Peter Mezey
Greg Wagner

Disaster Planning

Jacinta McCann
Dick Morten
Chris Poland

Housing

Ezra Mersey
Lydia Tan

Project Review

Reuben Schwartz

Sustainable Development

Paul Okamoto
Bry Sarte

Transportation

Gillian Gillet

TASK FORCES

Central Subway
Stephen Taber

Downtown Transit Center
Emilio Cruz

Doyle Drive

Amanda Hoenigman
Eph Hirsh
Peter Winkelstein

SB 375

Andy Barnes
Tay Via

OPERATING COMMITTEES

Audit

Peter Mezey

Board Development

Jim Andrew

Building Management

Larry Burnett

Business Membership

Tom Hart
Terry Micheau

Capital Campaign

Chris Meany

Earned Revenue

Bill Stotler

Executive

Andy Barnes

Finance

Terry Micheau

Major Donors

Linda Jo Fitz
Brian O'Neill

Individual Membership

Bill Stotler

Investment

Stanley Herzstein

Human Resources

Anne Halsted

Silver SPUR

David Hartley
Patricia Klitgaard

Bay Discovery Cruise

Claudine Cheng
Teresa Rea

Young Urbanists

Gwyneth Borden
Gia Daniller

Your turn!



The San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association is a member-supported nonprofit organization. Our mission is to promote good planning and good government through research, education and advocacy. **Write to us at editor@spur.org**

Still time to get on the boat!

11th Annual Bay Discovery Cruise

Monday June 8, 2009

Join us for dinner, dancing and to see the latest in Bay Bridge construction!

Go to spur.org/baycruise for tickets and information.

SPUR Staff

SPUR main number
415.781.8726

Membership Manager
Vickie Bell x121
vbelle@spur.org

Accountant
Terri Chang x128
tchang@spur.org

Citizen Planning Institute Director
Jim Chappell x125
jchappell@spur.org

Publications Assistant
Mary Davis x126
mdavis@spur.org

Urban Center Director
Diane Filippi x110
dfilippi@spur.org

Executive Assistant/
Board Liaison
Virginia Grandi x117
vgrandi@spur.org

Events Manager
Kelly Hardesty x120
khardesty@spur.org

Deputy Director
Sarah Karlinsky x129
skarlinsky@spur.org

Public Engagement Director
Julie Kim x112
jkim@spur.org

Development Director
Amie Latterman x115
alatterman@spur.org

Event Assistant
Nikki Lazarus x119
nlazarus@spur.org

Administrative Director
Lawrence Li x134
lili@spur.org

Executive Director
Gabriel Metcalf x113
gmetcalf@spur.org

Volunteer and Intern Team Leader
Jordan Salinger x136
jsalinger@spur.org

Development Associate
Rachel Seltzer x116
rseltzer@spur.org

Transportation Policy Director
Dave Snyder x135
dsnyder@spur.org

Capital Campaign Manager
Sarah Sykes x123
ssykes@spur.org

Sustainable Development Policy Director
Laura Tam x137
ltam@spur.org

Regional Planning Director
Egon Terplan x131
eterplan@spur.org



SAN FRANCISCO
PLANNING + URBAN RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

654 Mission Street
San Francisco, CA 94105-4015
tel. 415.781.8726
fax 415.781.7291
info@spur.org
www.spur.org

Time-dated material



First Class Mail
US Postage
PAID
Permit # 4118
San Francisco, CA