



# SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

## Executive Summary Planning Code Amendment Initiation HEARING DATE: NOVEMBER 29, 2018

*Project Name:* Polk / Pacific Special Area Design Guidelines  
*Case Number:* 2018-007888PCA [Board File No. TBD]  
*Staff Contact:* David Winslow – (415) 575-9175  
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*Reviewed by:* Aaron Starr, Manager of Legislative Affairs  
aaron.starr@sfgov.org, 415-558-6362  
*Recommendation:* **Initiate and Schedule for Adoption on or After 1.10.19**

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The action before this Commission is initiation of the code amendments described below. Initiation does not involve a decision on the substance of the amendments; it merely begins the required 20-day notice period, after which the Commission may hold a hearing and take action on the proposed Code amendments.

### PLANNING CODE AMENDMENT

The proposed Ordinance would amend the Polk NCD, and the Pacific Avenue NCD Code Sections 723 and 726 respectively (Zoning Control Tables), to reference the Polk / Pacific Special Area Design Guidelines.

#### The Way It Is Now:

The Zoning Control Tables in Code Sections 723 and 726 reference the Commerce and Industry Element's Urban Design Guidelines for design guidelines.

#### The Way It Would Be:

The Zoning Control Tables in Code Sections 723 and 726 will reference both the Commerce and Industry Element's Urban Design Guidelines and the Polk / Pacific Special Area Design Guidelines.

### BACKGROUND

As a part of the adoption of the Urban Design Guidelines in March 2018, members from the Middle Polk Neighborhood Association (MPNA), Lower Polk Neighbors (LPN), and Pacific Avenue Neighborhood Association (PANA), requested the Planning Department develop design guidelines for the Polk Street and Pacific Avenue Neighborhood Commercial Districts with the goals of addressing neighborhood-specific conditions and community values with clear guidance on the design of alterations and new buildings.

Most of the proposed guidelines were adapted from the existing Urban Design Guidelines found in the Commerce and Industry Element for Neighborhood Commercial Districts (which apply to all NC-Districts). The content of the existing guidelines was maintained but formatted to be consistent with the

recently adopted UDGs, and in some cases re-worded for clarity. The guidelines were augmented by illustrations and photographs and means that address specific conditions with input from neighborhood groups. Additional guidelines were added to respond to the design of alleys and roof decks

## **ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Summary of Proposed Guidelines**

The proposed Polk / Pacific Special Area Design guidelines provide an accessible and graphically legible document that builds upon and elaborates on the existing Urban Design Guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial Districts with:

- 1) A context statement of the Polk and Pacific NC- Districts that reference the Zoning controls;
- 2) A rationale for each guideline;
- 3) Descriptions and illustrations of features found within the district;
- 4) Illustrations and written examples that describe successful means of achieving the guidelines and lastly;
- 5) Additional guidelines that address specific community values

### **Existing Guidelines**

The current Urban Design Guidelines for NC-districts, were written as a list to generally cover the design issues of all NC-Districts, but lack certain aspects that would enable usability and accessibility such as:

1. Illustrative examples,
2. Descriptions of the specific neighborhood context, and
3. Current and neighborhood specific values that have evolved in the 40 years since the original guidelines were written.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Department recommends that the Commission recommend approval of the resolution to initiate the Planning Code amendments for consideration on or after January 10, 2019.

## **BASIS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

The Department recommends that the Commission initiate the proposed ordinance because it will allow Polk Pacific Special Area Design Guideline effort to move forward, adding more clarity and better organization to the Planning Department design review effort. Further, the Department believes that the January 10, 2019 adoption date will provide sufficient time for the community to review the proposed amendments and for the Department to conduct further outreach, if necessary.

## **REQUIRED COMMISSION ACTION**

The proposed Ordinance is before the Commission so that it may initiate the proposed Ordinance and schedule a time for the ordinance to be heard for adoption.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

The proposal to amend the Planning Code is anticipated to result in no physical impact on the environment. This is not a project as defined by under CEQA.

## **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

Planning Department staff worked closely with several community organizations including members from the Middle Polk Neighborhood Association (MPNA), Lower Polk Neighbors (LPN), Pacific Avenue Neighborhood Association (PANA), and Russian Hill Neighbors (RHN) multiple times to develop and review the draft of the Polk / Pacific Special Area Design Guidelines from Fall 2017 through Fall 2018. These meetings included walking tours and in person meetings to discuss and enhance the content of the proposed guidelines. This working relationship resulted in many revisions and enhancements to craft the Polk Pacific Special Area Design Guideline document in a manner that responds to and supports the community values and unique characteristics of these Neighborhood Commercial Districts.

As of the date of this report, the Planning Department has not received any public comment regarding the proposed Ordinance.

<b>RECOMMENDATION:</b> <b>Initiate and Consider Adoption on or after January 10, 2019</b>
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### **Attachments:**

- Exhibit A:     Draft Planning Commission Resolution
- Exhibit B:     Polk Pacific Special Area Design Guidelines
- Exhibit C:     Proposed Ordinance



# SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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## Planning Commission Draft Resolution

HEARING DATE NOVEMBER 29, 2018

*Project Name:* **Polk / Pacific Special Area Design Guidelines**  
*Case Number:* **2018-007888PCA [Board File No. TBD]**  
*Initiated by:* **Planning Commission**  
*Staff Contact:* **David Winslow, Principal Urban Designer and Architect,**  
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*Reviewed by:* **Aaron D Starr, Manager of Legislative Affairs**  
**aaron.starr@sfgov.org, 415-558-6362**  
*Recommendation:* **Initiate and Schedule for Adoption on or After January 10, 2019**

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### **INITIATING AMENDMENTS TO THE PLANNING CODE TO REFERENCE THE POLK/PACIFIC SPECIAL AREA DESIGN GUIDELINES; ADOPTING FINDINGS, INCLUDING ENVIRONMENTAL FINDINGS, PLANNING CODE SECTION 302 FINDINGS, AND FINDINGS OF CONSISTENCY WITH THE GENERAL PLAN AND PLANNING CODE SECTION 101.1.**

WHEREAS, The Planning Commission (hereinafter "Commission") conducted a duly noticed public hearing at a regularly scheduled meeting to consider initiation of the proposed Ordinance on November 29, 2018; and,

WHEREAS, the proposed amendments would amend the Planning Code Sections 723 and 726 to reference the Polk / Pacific Special Area Design Guidelines.

WHEREAS, the Polk / Pacific Special Area Design Guidelines will be considered for adoption at the same hearing that the proposed amendments will be considered; and

WHEREAS, the Environmental Review will be completed prior to the Commission taking action on this Ordinance; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has heard and considered the testimony presented to it at the public hearing and has further considered written materials and oral testimony presented on behalf of Department staff and other interested parties; and

WHEREAS, all pertinent documents may be found in the files of the Department, as the custodian of records, at 1650 Mission Street, Suite 400, San Francisco; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has reviewed the proposed Ordinance; and

MOVED, that pursuant to Planning Code Section 302(b), the Commission adopts a Resolution to initiate amendments to the Planning Code;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that pursuant to Planning Code Section 306.3, the Commission authorizes the Department to provide appropriate notice for a public hearing to consider the above referenced Planning Code amendments contained in the draft ordinance, approved as to form by the City Attorney in Exhibit A, to be considered at a publicly noticed hearing on or after **January 10, 2019**.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was adopted by the Commission at its meeting on November 29, 2018.

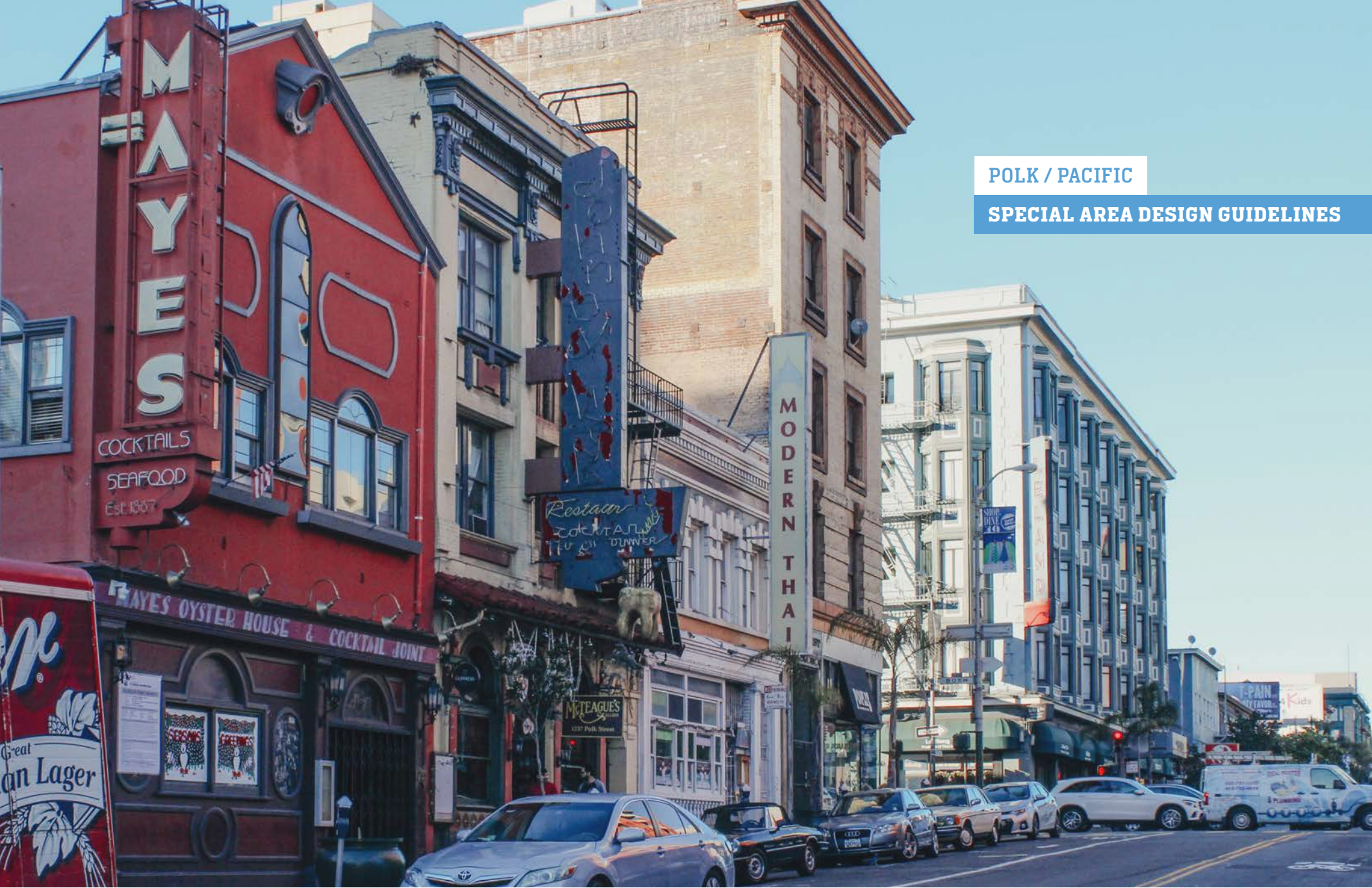
Jonas P. Ionin  
Commission Secretary

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ADOPTED:



POLK / PACIFIC

SPECIAL AREA DESIGN GUIDELINES



REVIEW DRAFT  
11.15.2018

San Francisco  
**Planning**



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## Polk/Pacific Neighborhood Commercial Context

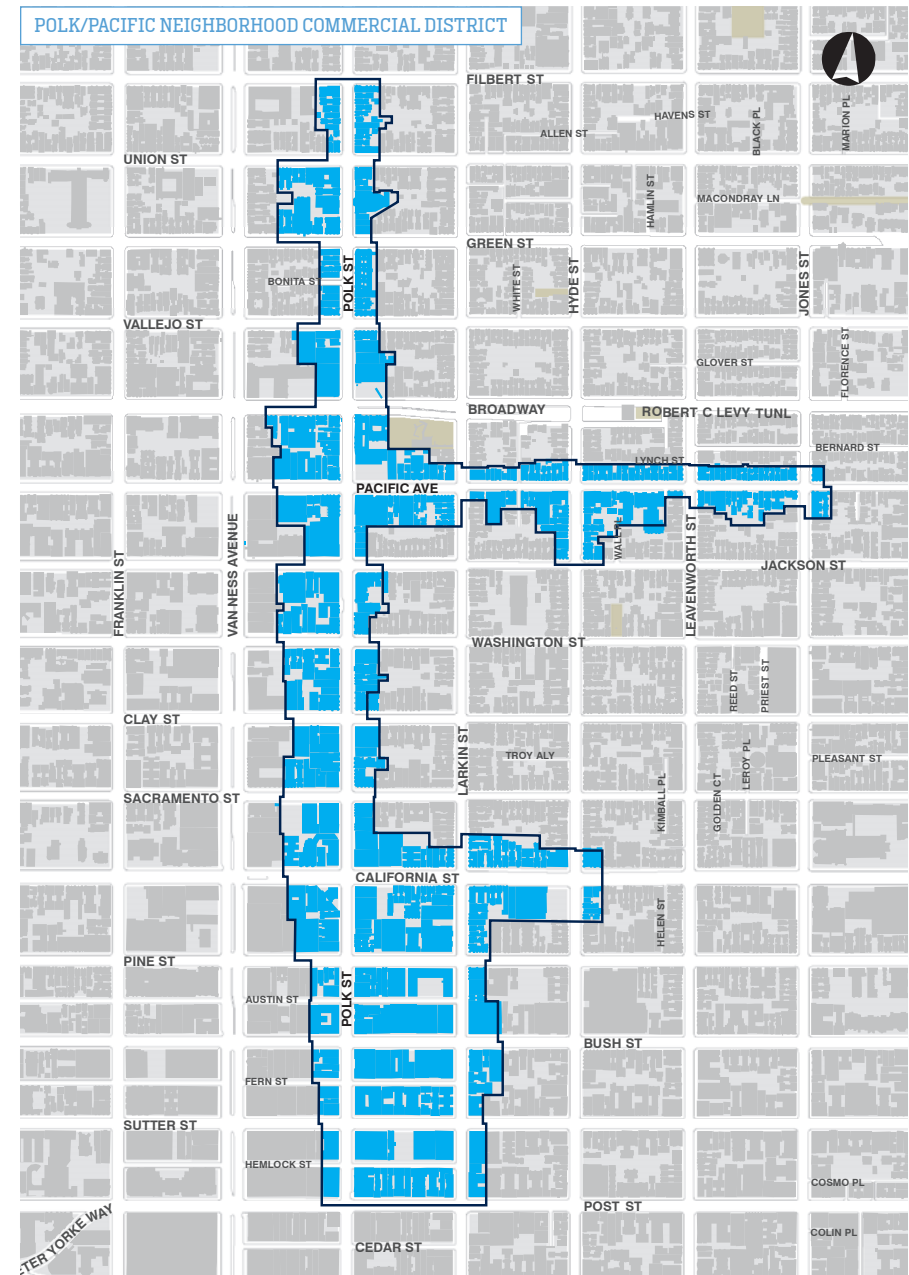
Sitting in the gulch between Nob and Russian Hills and Pacific Heights, Polk Street and Pacific Avenue are among the oldest and most dense neighborhood commercial districts in San Francisco. The adjoining Neighborhood Commercial Districts extend a mile north-south along Polk Street and include a portion of Larkin Street between Post and California Streets, and a five block portion of Pacific Avenue.

Polk Street's dense mixed-use character consists of buildings with ground-story commercial uses that extend commercial activity for almost its entire length. Residential units are typically located above the ground floor commercial.

The districts provide convenience goods and services to the residential communities in the Polk Gulch neighborhood and to the residents on the west slopes of Nob and Russian Hills. It has many apparel and specialty stores, as well as some automobile uses, which serve a broader trade area. Commercial uses also include offices, as well as restaurants and bars which keep the district active into the evening.

A common feature of these districts is the prevalence of small-scale development based on the small lot pattern of blocks which mainly were intended for residential development. During the first half of the century, in cases where several lots were merged for larger commercial development, builders tended to articulate the building facades to complement the scale of the smaller development.

The Polk Street NC District and Pacific Avenue NC District controls are designed to promote development with uses and built form that is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood, with a special emphasis on protecting and encouraging rear yards. On Polk Street, new buildings may contain commercial uses at the first two stories. On Pacific Avenue, new buildings may contain commercial uses on the ground floor only.



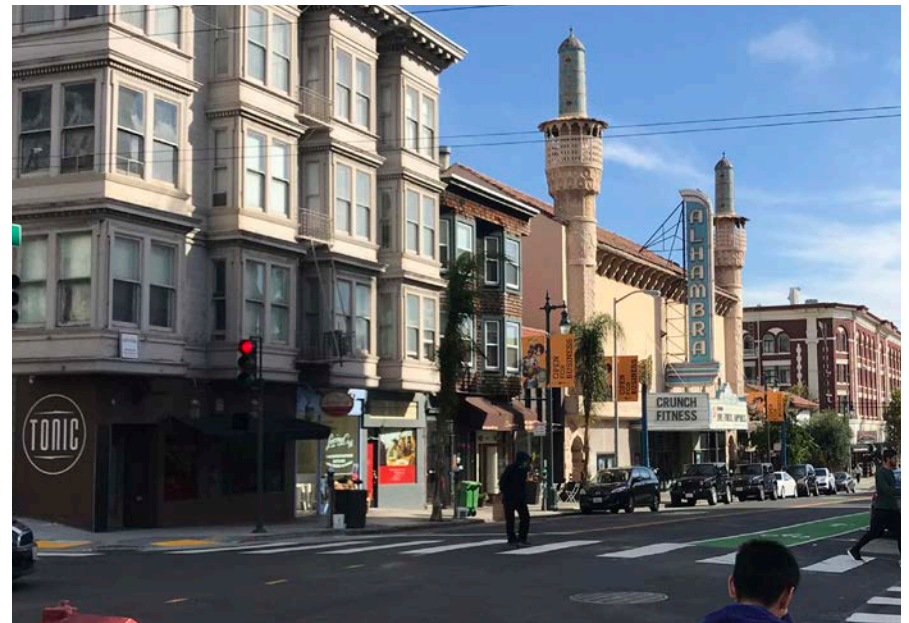
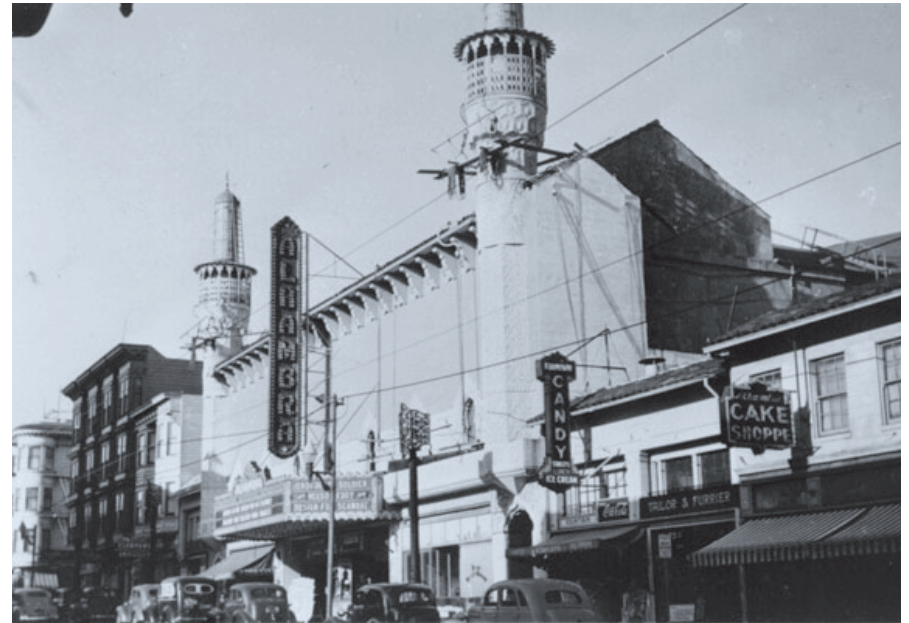
The Use Controls encourage smaller neighborhood-serving businesses on Polk Street and Pacific Avenue, while limiting uses that produce automobile congestion, noise and other nuisances, as well as uses that can displace local businesses. They also prohibit new adult entertainment uses. Restrictions on drive-up and most automobile uses protect the district's continuous retail frontage and prevent further traffic congestion.

The Pacific Avenue Neighborhood Commercial District (NCD) is on Pacific Avenue just east of Polk Street. It extends to all four corners of Pacific Avenue up to the four corners of Taylor Street and is situated on the North Slope of Nob Hill and south of the Broadway Tunnel. It includes the alleys running perpendicular and parallel to Pacific Avenue: McCormick Street, Morrell Street, Lynch Street, and Bernard Street.

Pacific Avenue is a mostly historic neighborhood with properties dating back to 1906 and 1907. It is a small scale, mixed-use neighborhood shopping district on a narrow street. Most of the lots are between 18 and 30 feet wide with two to three story buildings. Wider lots and some four story buildings are located mostly at the corners. Many of the Pacific Avenue properties are historic with original Victorian or Edwardian detail. The neighborhood businesses serve the community and adjacent neighborhoods with limited convenience goods and services.

The intent of the Pacific Avenue NCD Controls is to promote a small scale neighborhood environment along a mixed-use commercial street while preserving the surrounding neighborhood's historic and residential character. These controls:

- » preserve livability in a largely low-rise residential neighborhood,
- » protect and enhance solar access on a narrow street right-of-way
- » protect, enhance and contribute to residential rear yards at the grade and at all stories above, and
- » contribute additional open space adjacent to rear yards where feasible.



## Guideline Origin

The Polk / Pacific Special Area Design Guidelines are based on existing guidelines established in the Commerce and Industry Element of the San Francisco General Plan and the Polk Street NC District, and Pacific Avenue NC District of the Planning Code (Sections 723 and 726 respectively). The Guidelines illustrate means by which new development should contribute to the existing environment.

In an effort to preserve and promote the livability and attractiveness of the Polk and Pacific Neighborhood Commercial Districts, the design and siting of new buildings, additions, and alterations should be compatible with the character of surrounding buildings and the existing development patterns. In designing and evaluating a development proposal, consider the following patterns of the context:

- » Overall district scale;
- » Individual street character and form;
- » Lot development patterns;
- » Adjacent property usage, especially buildings of historical, cultural or architectural importance; and
- » Building massing and composition

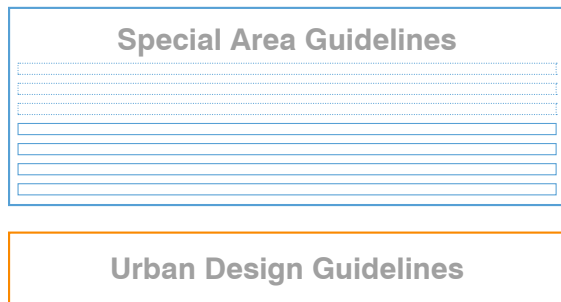


# Application of the Guidelines

The Special Area Design Guidelines establish a localized set of goals, values, and qualities by which projects are evaluated in design review: projects must demonstrate compliance with applicable guidelines to be successfully entitled. The Polk / Pacific Special Area Design Guidelines incorporate neighborhood-specific context statements and guidelines. The Guidelines illustrate how new development and building additions should contribute without disruption of the existing neighborhood scale and character.

The Polk / Pacific Special Area Design Guidelines work in concert with the Urban Design Guidelines (UDGs). Consistency with both sets of guidelines is mandatory in the approval process. Should application of the respective guidelines conflict, the Special Area Design Guidelines supercede the Urban Design Guidelines (UDGs).

**Guideline Structure:** Each guideline is described at the top of the page, followed by a sidebar that explains the rationale for the guideline, a range of means by which one might achieve that guideline, and illustrations that further describe its application. The range of means describes important parameters and methods by which a project can meet the guideline, but is not a prescriptive list. Projects may satisfy the guideline by applying one or all of the means or by suggesting something unique to the project that meets the intent. The guidelines are organized to relate and elaborate with more specificity to the relevant guideline in the Urban Design Guidelines. For example, S1.1 of the Polk / Pacific Special Area Design Guidelines is related to S1 of the UDGs. The illustrations are existing examples in the Polk and Pacific Commercial Districts that exemplify the means for the guideline indicated but are not necessarily exemplary of every guideline.



Each participating neighborhood

GUIDELINE	RATIONALE	MEANS	EXAMPLE
<p><b>A3.2 REFLECT THE ARCHITECTURAL QUALITY, COMPOSITION, AND DESIGN FEATURES OF EXISTING BUILDINGS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE POSITIVE VISUAL QUALITIES OF THE DISTRICT</b></p>	<p>North Beach developed as small buildings on narrow lots with facades composed of bays and storefronts with recessed entries. In most cases buildings are composed of strongly defined and differentiated bases, bodies, and tops.</p> <p>New buildings that recognize and respond to existing features, details and materials strengthen the existing neighborhood experience and character and maintain continuity with the neighborhood.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relate a new or remodeled building to its surrounding area by using compatible proportions, textures, and details. Nearby buildings of architectural distinction can serve as primary references. Existing street rhythms should also be continued on the facade of a new building.</li> <li>Respond to the ornamental scale of adjacent buildings. Historic features may be reinterpreted, but should be identifiable as from their own era. Avoid cursory historicism and facade elements that mimic neighbors.</li> <li>Individual buildings in the city's neighborhood commercial districts are rich in architectural detailing, yet vary considerably, depending upon the age and style of their construction. Vertical lines of columns or piers are common to many buildings as are moldings around windows and doors. These elements add richness to a flat facade wall, emphasizing the contrast of shapes and surfaces.</li> <li>Consider a rhythm of horizontal and vertical elements, such as bay windows, cornices, belt courses, window moldings, balconies, etc.</li> </ul>	
	<p>Add smaller, human-scaled features where they can be easily seen.</p>	<p>Architecture may vary, but the rhythms and proportions should resonate.</p>	



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# S SITE DESIGN

- S2.1 Reflect Setback Patterns
- S2.2 Respect Rear Yard Mid-Block Open Space and Retain Access to Light and Air of Adjacent Buildings and Open Space
- S2.3 Relate the Height of New Buildings to the Height and Scale of Adjacent Buildings
- S2.4 Step the Height of Buildings with Slope
- S2.5 Maximize Sun Access to Parks and Major Pedestrian Corridors - Especially in Alleys
- S2.6 Maintain Small Lots with Narrow Building Fronts Where This is the Traditional Pattern
- S5.1 Maintain the Prevailing Streetwall

# Site Design

The setting and built form of the Polk and Pacific Neighborhood Commercial Districts give them a unique neighborhood identity. The guidelines in this section guide the height, form, massing, and scale of development to maintain the balance between consistency and variety found in the district.

Site design is concerned about the massing of buildings and their relationship to topography, open space and the overall city fabric. Each building plays a role in the block and street environment and should support the existing patterns of open space, circulation, uses, access to sunlight, and pedestrian experience.

Three key patterns appear in this section's guidelines:

- » Respecting mid-block open space;
- » Defining the streetwall to fit the existing fabric; and
- » Shaping buildings to fit the scale of existing buildings.



## S2.1

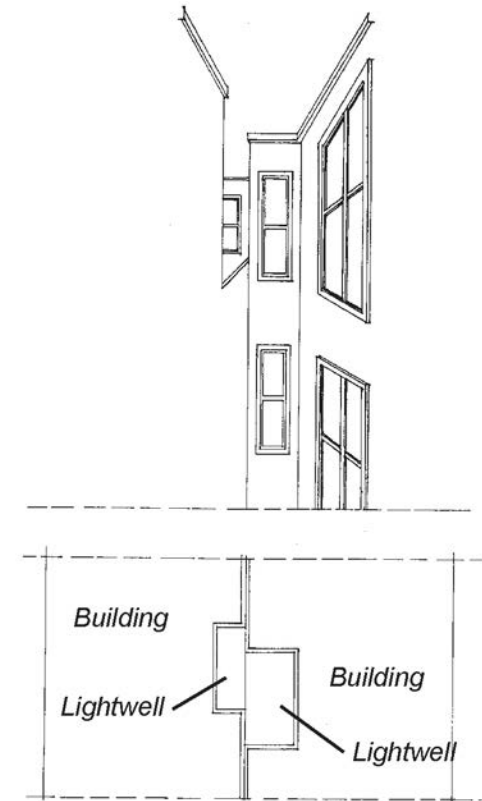
## REFLECT SETBACK PATTERNS

Side setbacks and light-wells are design features that provide light and air to narrow and deep buildings. These qualities should be protected to ensure the future livability and adaptability of these buildings.

- » Use front set-backs sparingly to provide space for outdoor activities such as sidewalk seating.
- » Protect existing lightwells and side setbacks by providing light wells and side setbacks that match existing adjacent conditions.
- » If an existing lightwell serves as a dwelling unit's only means of exposure to a rear yard or street, provide building set backs to preserve direct access to the open space.



Photo by Joey Parsons (CC BY-ND 2.0)



Provide shared light wells to maximize light to both properties.



## S2.2

## RESPECT REAR YARD MID-BLOCK OPEN SPACE AND RETAIN ACCESS TO LIGHT AND AIR OF ADJACENT BUILDINGS AND OPEN SPACE

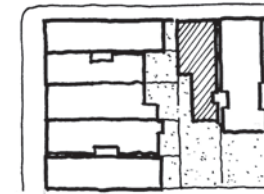
The aggregation of rear yards should create a mid-block open space that is visually accessible to residents and provides access to light and air for the back portions of buildings. It is important that access to the mid-block open space is not blocked. The same care must be taken to rear yards where development occurs adjacent to these districts. New development has the responsibility to create and contribute to mid-block open space -- even if no clear pattern exists.



Rear yards at grade provide opportunities for lush mature landscaping.

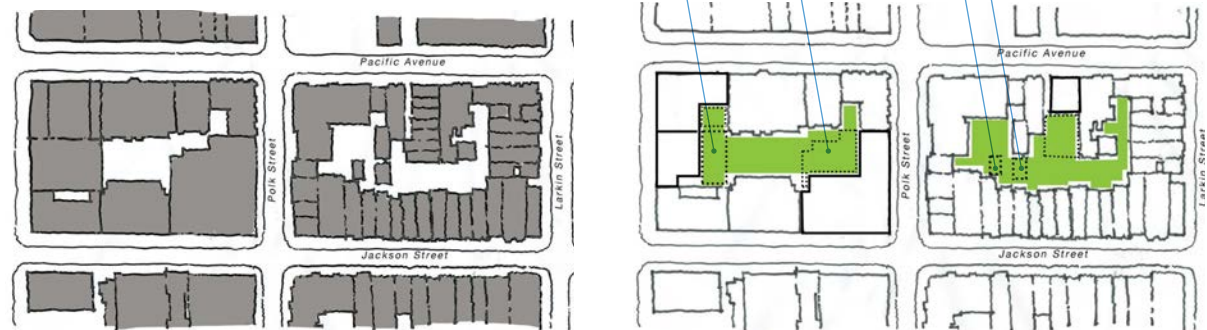
- » Locate, orient, and shape open space to establish, respect, or enhance the existing mid-block open space and minimize impacts to privacy.
- » Locate new buildings and additions so their open spaces retain access to light, air and the mid-block open space to adjacent buildings.
- » Additions over existing structures that encroach into rear yards have the obligation to contribute to the mid-block open space by removing non-conforming portions of buildings to establish Code-complying rear yards.
- » Where rear yards are perpendicular to new development it may be necessary to create a side yard to respect and augment the existing adjacent rear yards.

- » Rear yard open space should be at-grade or as close as possible to adjoining properties' rear yard open space, unless unusual or exceptional circumstances are present.
- » Rear yard open space is preferred on un-structured grade to allow for in ground planting.



Provide side yard setbacks to reflect rear yards perpendicular to new development.

Shape buildings to contribute and enhance mid-block open space



In order to create new rear yard open spaces that support and enhance existing mid block open space it may be necessary to remove non-conforming portions of buildings.

## S2.3

## RELATE THE HEIGHT OF NEW BUILDINGS TO THE HEIGHT AND SCALE OF ADJACENT BUILDINGS

Polk Street and Pacific Avenue have a range of buildings with varied heights and widths. Building design should avoid abrupt transitions and promote a continuity of scale.

- » Irrespective of height and bulk limits, provide transitions between high and low buildings on a street of varied building heights. While three- and four-story buildings are appropriate in many locations, two-story buildings are more appropriate in areas with lower-scale development.
- » Setback upper stories to be subordinate to the prevailing height of the street wall.
- » Sculpt buildings to avoid abrupt transitions in scale between existing buildings.
- » Provide setbacks to reduce impacts of light air and privacy to adjacent buildings and open spaces.
- » Provide setbacks that relate to setbacks of existing buildings.



Sloping the roof helps the massing of this building transition to the scale of the adjacent lower buildings.



Setting back the upper floor moderates the height and sense of scale between neighboring buildings.



Setting back the portion adjacent to the neighboring building helps ease the change of scale.

## S2.4

## STEP THE HEIGHT OF BUILDINGS WITH SLOPE

Typical to San Francisco, many of older buildings on Polk Street and Pacific Avenue were built to similar heights, and often on smaller lots -- with the effect of buildings clearly stepping with the slope of the streets. Buildings should embrace and reflect these site conditions in their collective form by stepping along with the topography.

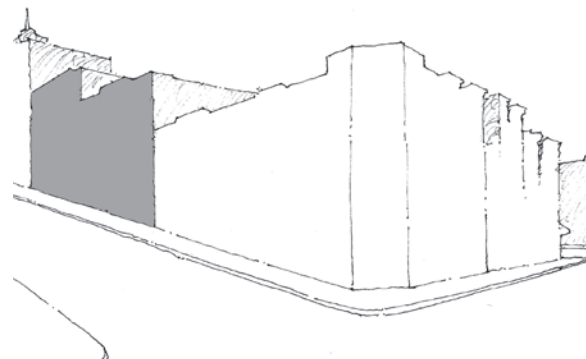
- » Step buildings with the slope of the street.
- » Step buildings with respect to the slope of the lot (upslope or downslope).
- » Articulate buildings so that greater building heights on corner sites may be expressed while also respecting the stepping pattern.
- » Sloped lots with wide frontages can result in an overly high building massing at the street. In these cases it may be necessary to step the massing to reflect the height and scale of existing buildings.



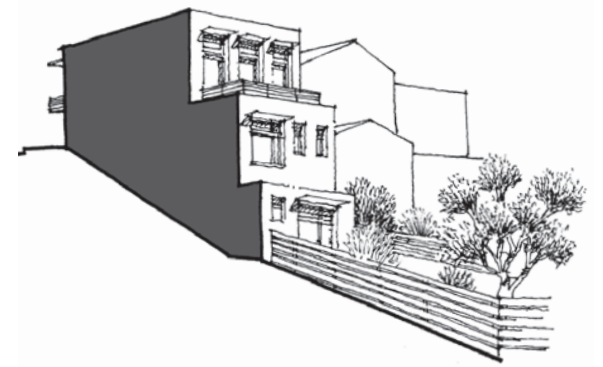
This building reinforces the streetwall by stepping with topography which also modulates its scale.



Example of older buildings stepping with slope along the street frontage.



Step the building to reinforce the topography and the scale of neighboring buildings.



Step the building mass to conform to the topography of the site toward the rear.

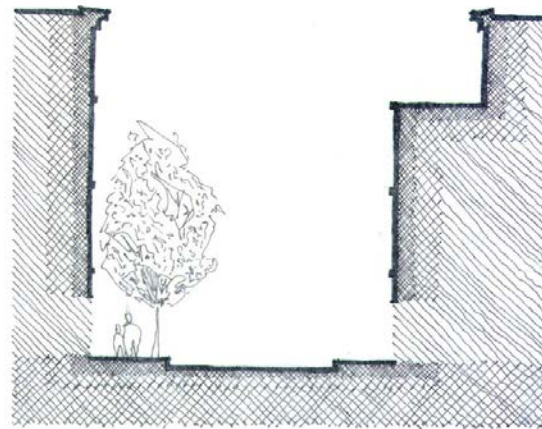
**S2.5****MAXIMIZE SUN ACCESS TO PLAZAS AND PEDESTRIAN CORRIDORS  
- ESPECIALLY IN ALLEYS**

Streets and alleys comprise most of the public open space in the Polk Street and Pacific Avenue corridors. Preserving sun light to these public spaces helps encourage their use, enjoyment, and activation of these neighborhoods. Planning Code Section 261.1 requires setbacks at upper stories on narrow streets and alleys.

- » Setback or otherwise sculpt upper floors to protect solar access and minimize shadows on alleys.
- » In some cases it may be necessary to reduce the height of proposed development to preserve sun access.
- » Locate and shape buildings to reduce shadows on public open space.



Low scale development on alleys preserves light to the street space.



Step upper floors of building back to preserve sun access to alleys.



New buildings fronting alleys should retain solar access.

## S2.6

## MAINTAIN SMALL LOTS WITH NARROW BUILDING FRONTS WHERE THIS IS THE TRADITIONAL PATTERN

Pacific Avenue has a fairly consistent range of traditional building widths based on 25'-30' wide lots, where Polk has buildings that range from a full block to single lot buildings. The effect larger development can have in altering the traditional sense of neighborhood scale should be recognized and tempered.

- » Reflect neighborhood-prevailing lot widths and proportion and size of architectural elements in the modulation of the proposed building.
- » Design new buildings on large lots as a series of elements which are compatible with the existing scale of the district.



Building widths and expression of new buildings should be consistent with frontages in the neighborhood.



A typical pattern of Polk Street

**S5.1****MAINTAIN THE PREVAILING STREET WALL**

There are almost no front setbacks, other than recessed entries, along Polk Street or Pacific Avenue. And where they do occur it weakens the definition of public space. Street facades promote a continuity of urban fabric along with pedestrian experience. The scale and design of building fronts at the street contribute to an active, engaging, and pedestrian-oriented streetscape.

- » Design new buildings to help define and maintain the street wall.
- » Stepping buildings with topography maintains continuity of the street wall height.
- » Design building frontages with active and direct engagement to the street to support pedestrian-oriented activity.
- » Consider the width of the sidewalk in establishing the articulation of the streetwall.
- » Absolute consistency with streetwalls is not always necessary. In some settings, it may be appropriate for a frontage to employ a forecourt, setback, or recess that acts as a lively

counterpoint to a street wall, but not to such an extent that it erodes the overall sense of urban enclosure.

- » Design inviting transitional entrance spaces between the building and the street.
- » Use front set-backs for special circumstances that provide space for outdoor activities such as sidewalk cafes and walk-up windows, or publicly accessible open space. Public open space is appropriate where the retail activity of the street is not adversely affected; there is a shortage of nearby open space to serve people; the site is appropriate in terms of its topography and sun and wind conditions; and attractive seating and landscaping are provided.



Strong street facades provide a backdrop for the public realm.



Continuous street facades present creates a defined sidewalk space.



Photo by José Pestana

A vertical banner for San Francisco State University. It features a photograph of a person with a large afro hairstyle. The text on the banner reads: "We make discovery happen. sfsu.edu SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY".



# ARCHITECTURE

- A1.1 Preserve Architecturally Important Buildings
- A3.1 Harmonize with the Scale, Proportions, Texture, and Character of the District
- A3.2 Reflect the Architectural Quality, Composition and Design Features of Existing Buildings that Contribute to the Positive Visual Qualities of the District
- A4.1 Design Blank Walls with High Quality Materials and Composition
- A4.2 Design Roofs and Balconies to Minimize Privacy, Visual, and Noise Impacts
- A7.1 Relate Size and Design of Signs to be Compatible with the Character and Scale of the Building as well as the Neighborhood Commercial District
- A8.1 Maximize Commercial Storefront Transparency
- A8.2 Design Storefronts with Human-Scaled Features



# Architecture

The buildings in the Polk and Pacific districts have a variety of visual character spanning various eras of development which all work together to form a vibrant urban fabric. In order to fit into this fabric without dramatic disruption, new buildings have an obligation to respectfully add to the richness of character, texture, and human-scale of their neighbors.

The guidelines in this section guide the architectural features and composition of new buildings and additions to reinforce or enhance the physical patterns and features of surrounding buildings through the use of:

- » Compatible scale,
- » Proportions,
- » Facade composition,
- » Materials, and
- » Roof forms.

Application of these guidelines is intended to add new variations within the consistency and familiarity of Polk and Pacific NCDs.



**A1.1****PRESERVE ARCHITECTURALLY  
IMPORTANT BUILDINGS**

Retention of older, well-designed and irreplaceable buildings is sometimes just as important as building something new. Renovation and restoration of buildings is a sustainable building practice that also helps to link us with the past, preserve neighborhood character and add visual interest to the streetscape while also providing a pleasant contrast to new development.

- » Development of auto service garage sites should retain significant portions of the existing structure while accommodating new additions.
- » Use the character, texture, materiality, and human-scale of the old to set the standard for the new development.
- » Reuse or rehabilitate existing structures in sound condition and of worthwhile architectural character where feasible to retain the unique character of a given neighborhood commercial district.
- » Reflect the compositional organization or material qualities of the older building in the new architecture.



Historic fabric provides fine grain and patterns that represent different eras.



Look for ways to preserve old buildings for new uses in meaningful ways.



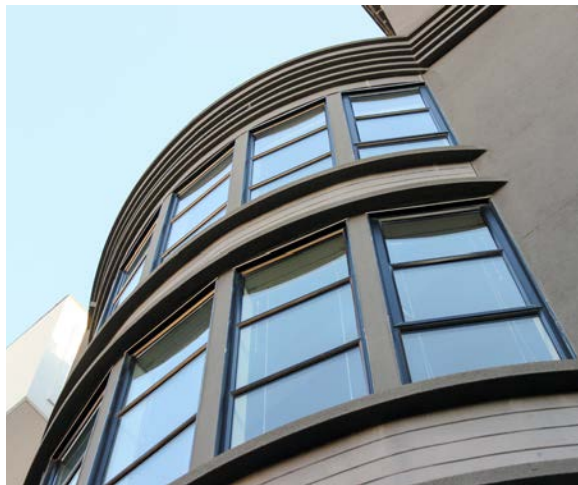
Historic buildings function as focal points for the neighborhood.

**A3.1****HARMONIZE WITH THE SCALE, PROPORTIONS, TEXTURE AND CHARACTER OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL DISTRICT**

Many of the buildings that define Polk Street were developed in the Victorian era with vertically proportioned bays and windows, detailed with wood trim and clad in wood and stucco.

Respecting scale and proportion in the design of buildings help maintain continuity with the existing context.

- » Design alterations and new buildings to be compatible with existing buildings' architectural quality to contribute to and preserve the scale and character of the neighborhood commercial district.
- » The details, material, and color of existing architecturally distinctive buildings should be complemented by new development.
- » Buildings designed to follow a prescribed formula by businesses with multiple locations is discouraged if such design would be incompatible with the scale and character of the district in which the building is located.
- » Proportion the scale and overall amount of glazing to the existing building patterns.
- » Limit glass at the rear of buildings and neighbor facing sides to the same proportions as neighboring buildings.
- » Reflect the positive aspects of the existing scale and design features of the area in the design of new buildings, additions and alterations, and facade renovations. Building forms should complement and improve the overall neighborhood environment.



Projecting head and sill trim adds shadow and detail.



Vertically proportioned windows with divided lites reflect the prevailing scale of the neighborhood.



New buildings maintain the fabric of existing residential qualities above the ground level commercial uses.

**A3.2****REFLECT THE ARCHITECTURAL QUALITY, COMPOSITION, AND DESIGN FEATURES OF EXISTING BUILDINGS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE POSITIVE VISUAL QUALITIES OF THE DISTRICT**

Many buildings along Polk Street developed as large facades composed with simple, regular repeating features. In most cases buildings are composed of strongly defined and differentiated bases, bodies, and tops.

New buildings that recognize and respond to existing features, details and materials strengthen and maintain continuity with the existing neighborhood.

- » Relate a new or remodeled building to its surrounding area by using compatible proportions, textures, and details. Nearby buildings of architectural distinction can serve as primary references. Existing street rhythms should also be continued on the facade of a new building, linking it to the rest of the district.
- » Individual buildings in the Polk neighborhood commercial districts are rich in architectural detailing, yet vary considerably from building to building, depending upon the age and style of their construction. Vertical lines of columns or piers, and horizontal lines of belt courses or cornices are common to many buildings as are moldings around windows and doors. These elements add

richness to a flat facade wall, emphasizing the contrast of shapes and surfaces.

- » Respond to the ornamental scale of adjacent buildings. Historic features may be reinterpreted, but should be identifiable as from their own era. Avoid cursory historicism and facade elements that mimic neighbors.
- » Consider a rhythm of horizontal and vertical elements, such as bay windows, cornices, belt courses, and window moldings.
- » Balconies provide an opportunity for an active interface with the street, but should be limited in size and exposure to the street.



A facade is modulated with the spacing pattern of windows.



The spirit of artistic detail of this building give it life and a unique identity, but it also shares common materials and features with its neighbors.



Recognize and reflect architectural features that occur in the neighborhood. A building entry is made evident through detailing.

## A4.1

## DESIGN BLANK WALLS WITH HIGH QUALITY MATERIALS AND COMPOSITION

Ground floor commercial uses on Polk Street should maintain consistent transparency. When buildings on cross streets and alleys vary in height property line walls are often exposed. Due to building uses other walls may need to be solid. Blank walls that are visible should exhibit high quality design and materiality.

- » Design all visible facades with similar effort and consideration as primary facades
- » Sculpt and articulate sidewalls that are likely to be significantly exposed.
- » Match materials used on the primary facade
- » Match the texture and scale and pattern of the primary facade.

RIGHT: Materials that are found on the primary facade are used on the exposed side walls, providing a unifying element of scale as well.



Walls that cannot be transparent may be augmented with other design features.



Storefronts along Polk Street should maintain transparency.

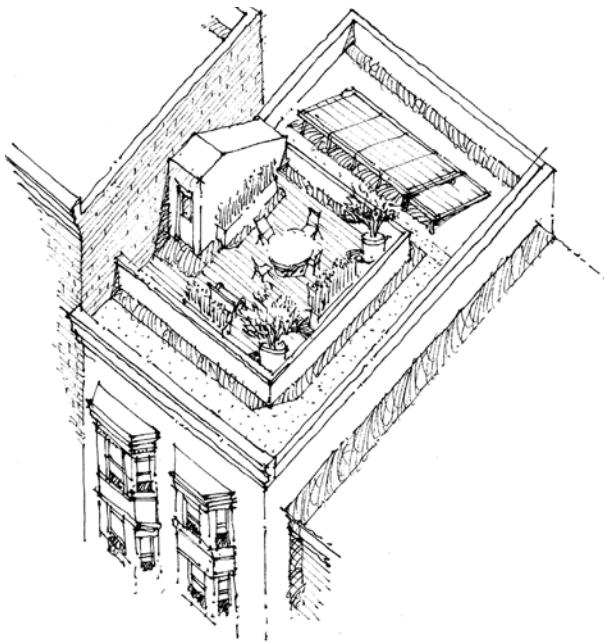


Murals engage the eye, and when significant and extensive can attract visitors and foot traffic.

## A4.2

## DESIGN ROOFS AND BALCONIES TO MINIMIZE VISUAL, NOISE, AND PRIVACY IMPACTS

In a city of hills and tall buildings, roofs can be seen from many vantage points. The extent to which roof top appurtenances and uses affect the visual quality, noise, and access to sunlight needs to be considered.



To minimize its impact and visibility this deck is minimized in size and set back from all building edges.

- » Locate rooftop mechanical equipment away from areas of residential use. Intentionally screen and integrate with the design of the building.
- » Minimize, combine, and locate stair and elevator penthouses and roof top utilities to reduce their visual impact and to integrate into the overall building architecture.
- » Size and locate roof decks to minimize impacts to privacy, and visual and noise impacts.
- » Decking and green roofs support a more visually compelling roof landscape and reduce



Treating the roof as a garden creates a visual amenity.

solar gain, air pollution, and the amount of water entering the stormwater system.

- » Use translucent or opaque materials at balconies to avoid visual clutter.
- » Roof decks should not replace rear yards and mid-block open space. Roof decks by their nature create conditions for privacy and noise impacts. Rear yards and side yards are preferred over roof decks where possible.
- » Roof decks, where appropriate, should be placed overlooking major streets, and away from rear yard open spaces and alleys.



Opaque or translucent materials increase privacy for residents and improve the visual experience from the public realm.

**A7.1****RELATE SIZE AND DESIGN OF SIGNS TO BE COMPATIBLE WITH THE CHARACTER AND SCALE OF THE BUILDING AS WELL AS THE NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL DISTRICT**

The character of signs and other features attached to or projecting from buildings is an important part of the visual appeal of a street and the general quality and economic stability of the area. Opportunities exist to relate these signs and projections more effectively to street design and building design. As much as signs and other advertising devices are essential to a vital commercial district, they should not interfere with or diminish the livability of residences within the neighborhood commercial district or in adjacent residential districts.

- » Signs should not be attached to facades at residentially- occupied stories nor should sign illumination shine directly into windows of residential units.
- » Externally illuminated blade or banner signs, rear lit “halo” letters, window decals, hand painted and awning valance signage are appropriate.
- » Use signs to demonstrate craft and uniqueness of the business.
- » Coordinate signs with scale, location and design of other business signs.
- » Control the intensity of building and signage lighting and allow for dimming and color variation.
- » Orient and size signs to the pedestrian scale, and so as to not overwhelm the building facade.
- » Design building signs to reflect the type and sensibility of their use. Consider marquees where programmatically appropriate.
- » Design signs and canopies appropriately to illustrate the hierarchy of entrances and information along facades where there are many elements or uses.
- » Deep, arched shaped awnings that incorporate large signage and cover clerestory windows should be avoided.
- » Internally illuminated box signs or letters, oversized awning signage, and exposed conduit or raceways should be avoided.



Signage has the ability to enhance the architectural character of the building.



Signage inventively incorporated as a facade element highlights the store entry.



Window decals are part of a subtle and elegant signage approach.

## A8.1

## MAXIMIZE COMMERCIAL STOREFRONT TRANSPARENCY

Buildings that provide an active and transparent interface between their interior uses and the street support interest, well-being, and safety through natural surveillance. The design of retail storefronts should create an engaging, human-scale experience at the street.

- » Use clear, un-tinted glass at the street level to allow maximum visual interaction between sidewalk areas and the interior of buildings. Mirrored, highly reflective glass or densely-tinted glass should not be used except as an architectural or decorative accents.



Awnings mounted between storefront and clerestory windows maintain facade transparency.

- » The use of security gates/ bars is discouraged to maintain transparency. If used, operable security gates should be located on the interior and left open during business hours. Exterior mounted roll up grates are not recommended.
- » Where a substantial length of blank wall is unavoidable, use eye-level display, a contrast in wall treatment, outdoor seating and/or landscaping to enhance visual interest and pedestrian vitality.
- » Awnings should be mounted between the storefront and clerestory windows to avoid obscuring architectural details and maintain transparency.
- » Clerestory windows should not be covered or obscured.



Recessed entries and clear display windows engage store interiors with the sidewalk.



Outdoor sidewalk displays may be augment the intent of this guideline, so long as sufficient room is retained on the sidewalk for travel.



Corner entries offer unique opportunities.



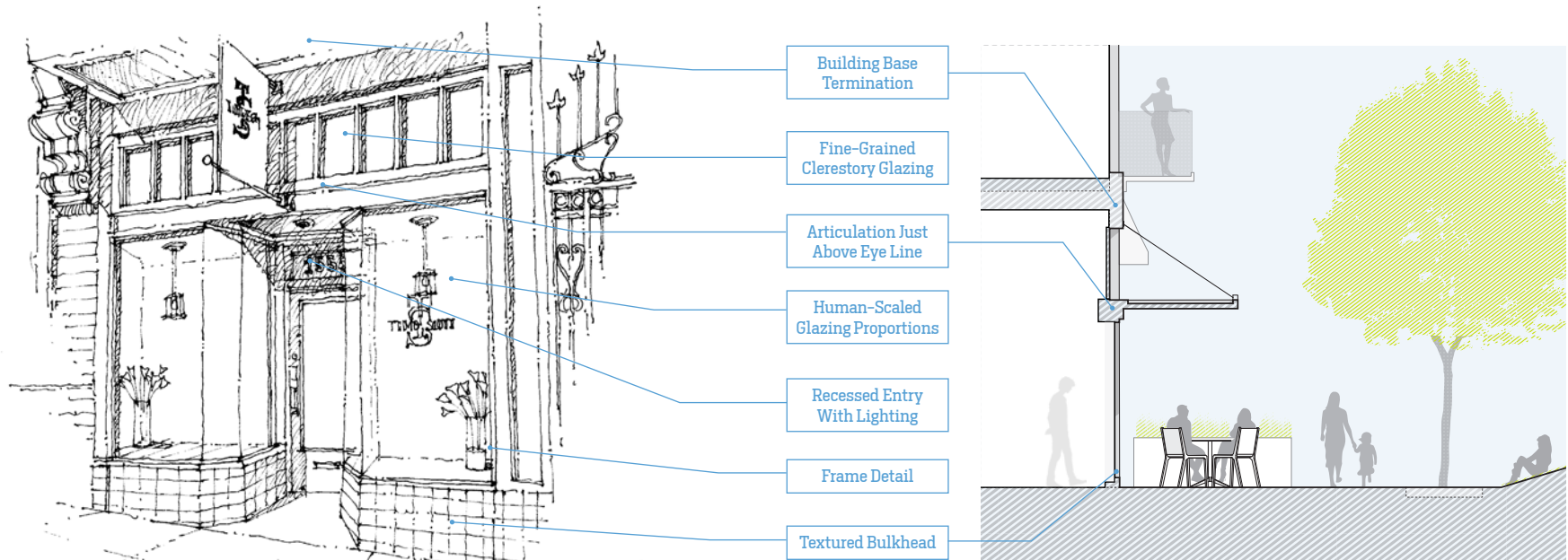
## A8.2

## DESIGN STOREFRONTS WITH HUMAN-SCALED FEATURES

The ground floors of the district are primarily comprised of commercial storefronts and residential entries-- where the public interacts most with buildings. Ground floors that are designed to be active, invitational, and human-scaled can foster a successful neighborhood.

- » Use features such as transom bands and windows, projecting signage, and high bulkheads to provide scale.
- » Use lighting to highlight significant building features but do not over-light buildings nor project light into the sky. Employ sustainable or "dark sky" measures to reduce illumination when not needed.

- » Recess and provide adequate transition space for storefront entries to allow people to step out of the pedestrian flow.
- » Design corner entries for corner buildings.
- » Design lighting to reinforce pedestrian comfort at the ground level.
- » Compositionally integrate signage, canopies and other finer-grained architectural elements to impart human-scale, enhance the public realm, and harmonize a project with its context



Human-scaled features at the storefront help create comfortable places for people.

Storefront features including bulkheads, transoms, signage, and awnings provide shelter and a human-scale at the street.





# P PUBLIC REALM

- P2.1 Improve Polk Gulch Alleys
- P2.2 Improve the Alleys off Pacific Avenue to Serve as Neighborhood Open Space
- P5.1 Provide Street Trees with New Development
- P5.2 Use Landscaping to Buffer Parking and Unbuilt Lots

# Public Realm

The Polk Street and Pacific Avenue Neighborhood Commercial Districts are transit and pedestrian friendly -- with the public realm consisting mainly of sidewalks, alleys, and parklets. These fine-grained streetscapes support everyday life, nurture the public experience, and express the identity of these neighborhoods.

This Section addresses streetscape design to enhance and encourage walking, bicycling, and the use of public transportation as well as general comfort and well-being on the streets.

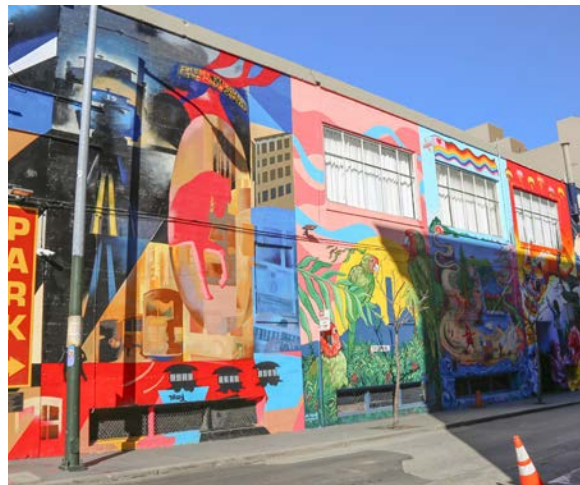


**P2.1**

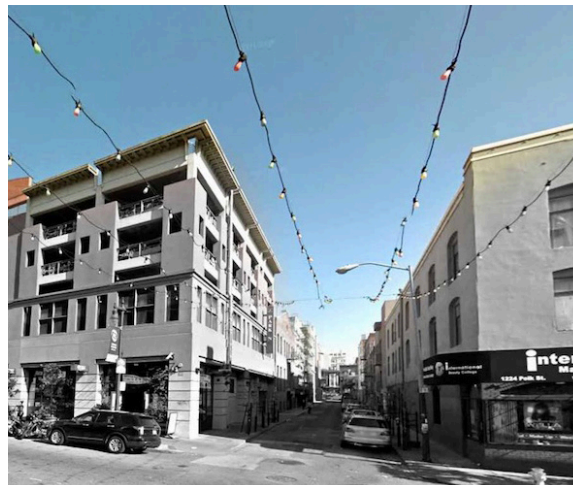
**IMPROVE POLK GULCH ALLEYS**

Polk gulch is a dense neighborhood with few large green parks or public open spaces. The alleys are an opportunity to provide neighborhood serving open spaces and public amenities. The Middle Polk community has invested much effort to create a vision plan to design and activate these alleys.

- » Larger projects that abut alleys and subject to the Better Streets Plan should focus efforts to make improvements consistent with the Community Vision Plan. Refer to the Lower Polk Alleyways District Vision Plan for specific pedestrian priority designs.

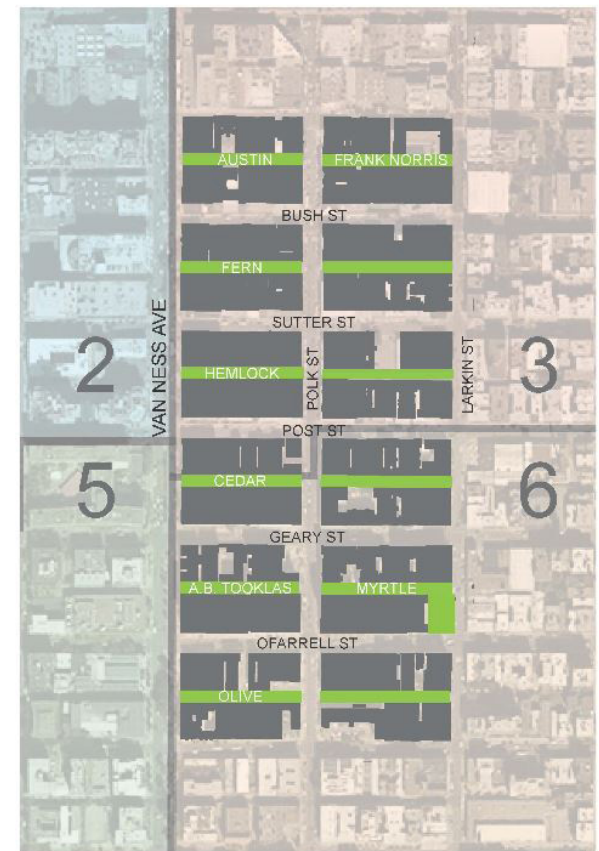


Animating blank walls with murals in alleys helps create a sense of life and care.



Lighting helps animate alleys.

POLK ALLEYWAY DISTRICT



Lower Polk Alley Master Plan map

## P2.2

### IMPROVE THE ALLEYS OFF PACIFIC AVENUE TO SERVE AS NEIGHBORHOOD OPEN SPACE

The extremely narrow alleys near Pacific Avenue have limited sun exposure yet serve as quiet, walkable, human-scaled pedestrian spaces that offer a respite in a dense neighborhood. These alleys are an opportunity to provide neighborhood serving open spaces and public amenities.

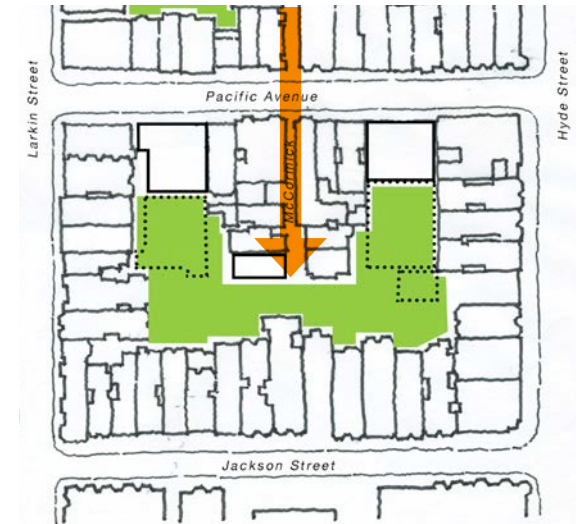
- » Step back upper floors of new building additions to allow sun access and preserve the building scale on alleys.
- » Consider design and means to provide pedestrian amenities such as seating and lighting.
- » Provide sidewalk landscaping and paving.
- » Adding garages is strongly discouraged.



Alleys provide important physical and visual connections within the neighborhood.



The small scale of buildings that are prevalent on alleys should be respected.



Consider connecting alleys to contribute to mid-block open space.

**P5.1****PROVIDE STREET TREES WITH NEW DEVELOPMENT**

Regularly spaced street trees selected to complement the street contribute much to the sense of overall pedestrian comfort and safety.



Trees can frame and define the sidewalk almost as much as the buildings.

- » If a district tree planting program or streetscape plan exists, new development should be landscaped in conformity with such plans.
- » Trees should be scaled according to their context, including the intensity of activity, building heights, and available light.
- » Select trees that thrive in the climate and have high, open canopies to maintain storefront visibility and create dappled shade and shadow.
- » Protect trees from automobiles by creating buffers
- » Minimize conflicts between pedestrians in the location of trees
- » Align trees and other sidewalk landscape features to provide a direct and continuous path of travel.
- » Size tree wells and planters to support healthy trees and increased foliage.
- » Consider permeable paving wherever possible to reduce water flow during heavy rain.
- » Integrate pedestrian lighting with tree wells.
- » In places where tree planting is not appropriate due to inadequate sidewalk width, interference with utilities, undesirable shading, or other reasons, other means such as window boxes, planter boxes or trellises may be chosen.



Street trees help define sidewalk space and use.



Properly selected and healthy street trees help moderate the scale of buildings to the human scale.



## P5.2

## USE LANDSCAPING TO BUFFER PARKING AND UNBUILT LOTS

Gaps that occur in the building streetwall may be opportunities for visually screening and greening undesirable uses.

- » Visually screen parking lots along the street frontage by low walls, earth berms and/or landscaping. Buffer the edges of parking lots bordering residentially-developed properties with trees and shrubs.
- » Introduce landscape features such as trellises to soften the edges while bridging gaps in the streetwall.
- » Consider maintenance and stewardship in development of uses and features.
- » Use planters, ledges, and low walls to provide places for people to view, socialize, and rest.



Landscaping shields the view of cars from the street but also shields car headlights onto the street.



Built landscape features can help bridge gaps in the street wall.

## **Photo Credits**

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**San Francisco**  
**Planning**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**  
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1660 Mission Street, First Floor  
San Francisco CA 94103-2479

TEL: **415.558.6377**

*Planning staff are available by phone and at the PIC counter.  
No appointment is necessary.*

1 [Planning Code – Permitting Polk/Pacific Special Area Design Guidelines]

2

3 **Ordinance amending the Planning Code to reference the Polk/Pacific Special Area**  
4 **Design Guidelines; affirming the Planning Department’s determination under the**  
5 **California Environmental Quality Act; adopting findings of public necessity,**  
6 **convenience, and welfare under Planning Code, Section 302; and making findings of**  
7 **consistency with the General Plan and the eight priority policies of Planning Code**  
8 **Section 101.1.**

9 NOTE: **Unchanged Code text and uncodified text** are in plain Arial font.  
10 **Additions to Codes** are in *single-underline italics Times New Roman font*.  
11 **Deletions to Codes** are in ~~*strikethrough italics Times New Roman font*~~.  
12 **Board amendment additions** are in double-underlined Arial font.  
13 **Board amendment deletions** are in ~~strikethrough Arial font~~.  
14 **Asterisks (\* \* \* \*)** indicate the omission of unchanged Code  
15 subsections or parts of tables.

16 Be it ordained by the People of the City and County of San Francisco:

17

18 Section 1. Findings.

19 (a) The Planning Department has determined that the actions contemplated in this  
20 ordinance comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (California Public Resources  
21 Code Sections 21000 *et seq.*). Said determination is on file with the Clerk of the Board of  
22 Supervisors in File No. \_\_\_\_\_ and is incorporated herein by reference. The Board affirms this  
23 determination.

24 (b) On \_\_\_\_\_, the Planning Commission, in Resolution No. \_\_\_\_\_, adopted  
25 findings that the actions contemplated in this ordinance are consistent, on balance, with the  
City’s General Plan and eight priority policies of Planning Code Section 101.1. The Board

1 adopts these findings as its own. A copy of said Resolution is on file with the Clerk of the  
2 Board of Supervisors in File No. \_\_\_\_\_, and is incorporated herein by reference.

3 (c) Pursuant to Planning Code Section 302, this Board finds that this ordinance will  
4 serve the public necessity, convenience, and welfare for the reasons set forth in Planning  
5 Commission Resolution No. \_\_\_\_\_ and the Board incorporates such reasons herein by  
6 reference. A copy of said Resolution is on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors in  
7 File No. \_\_\_\_\_.

8  
9 Section 2. The Planning Code is hereby amended by revising Sections 723 and 726,  
10 to read as follows:

11 **SEC. 723. POLK STREET NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL DISTRICT.**

12 \* \* \* \*

13 (b) Controls.

14 \* \* \* \*

15 (5) Neighborhood Commercial Design Guidelines. The construction of new buildings  
16 and alteration of existing buildings in the Polk Street NCDistrict shall be consistent with the design  
17 policies and guidelines of the General Plan and with the "Polk / Pacific Special Area Design  
18 Guidelines" as adopted by the Planning Commission. The Planning Director may require  
19 modifications to the exterior of a proposed new building or proposed alteration of an existing  
20 residential building in order to bring it into conformity with the " Polk / Pacific Special Area Design  
21 Guidelines" and with the General Plan. These modifications may include, but are not limited to,  
22 changes in siting, building envelope, scale texture and detailing, openings, and landscaping.

23 //

24 //

25 //

1 Table 723. POLK STREET NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL DISTRICT  
 2 ZONING CONTROL TABLE

Polk Street NCD		
Zoning Category	§ References	Controls
<b>BUILDING STANDARDS</b>		
* * * *		
Miscellaneous		
* * *	* * * *	* * * *
*		
Design Guidelines	General Plan Commerce and Industry Element <i>and the Polk/Pacific Special Area Design Guidelines</i>	Subject to the Urban Design Guidelines <i>and the Polk/Pacific Special Area Design Guidelines</i>

14 \* \* \* \*

15  
 16 **SEC. 726. PACIFIC AVENUE NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL DISTRICT.**

17 \* \* \* \*

18 (b) Controls.

19 \* \* \* \*

20 **(4) Neighborhood Commercial Design Guidelines.** *The construction of new buildings*  
 21 *and alteration of existing buildings in the Pacific Avenue Neighborhood Commercial District shall be*  
 22 *consistent with the design policies and guidelines of the General Plan and with the "Polk/Pacific*  
 23 *Special Area Design Guidelines" as adopted by the Planning Commission. The Planning Director may*  
 24 *require modifications to the exterior of a proposed new building or proposed alteration of an existing*  
 25 *residential building in order to bring it into conformity with the " Polk/Pacific Special Area Design*

*Guidelines" and with the General Plan. These modifications may include, but are not limited to, changes in siting, building envelope, scale texture and detailing, openings, and landscaping.*

Table 726. PACIFIC AVENUE NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL DISTRICT  
ZONING CONTROL TABLE

Pacific Avenue NCD		
Zoning Category	§ References	Controls
<b>BUILDING STANDARDS</b>		
* * * *		
Miscellaneous		
* * *	* * * *	* * * *
*		
Design Guidelines	General Plan Commerce and Industry Element <i>and the Polk/Pacific Special Area Design Guidelines</i>	Subject to the Urban Design Guidelines <i>and the Polk/Pacific Special Area Design Guidelines</i>

\* \* \* \*

Section 3. Effective Date. This ordinance shall become effective 30 days after enactment. Enactment occurs when the Mayor signs the ordinance, the Mayor returns the ordinance unsigned or does not sign the ordinance within ten days of receiving it, or the Board of Supervisors overrides the Mayor’s veto of the ordinance.

Section 4. Scope of Ordinance. In enacting this ordinance, the Board of Supervisors intends to amend only those words, phrases, paragraphs, subsections, sections, articles, numbers, punctuation marks, charts, diagrams, or any other constituent parts of the Municipal

1 Code that are explicitly shown in this ordinance as additions, deletions, Board amendment  
2 additions, and Board amendment deletions in accordance with the “Note” that appears under  
3 the official title of the ordinance.

4  
5 APPROVED AS TO FORM:  
6 DENNIS J. HERRERA, City Attorney

7 By: \_\_\_\_\_  
8 KATE H. STACY  
9 Deputy City Attorney

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