



# SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

**MEMO**

**DATE:** January 13, 2016  
**TO:** Historic Preservation Commission  
**FROM:** Nicholas Perry, Planner/Urban Designer  
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**REVIEWED BY:** Timothy Frye, Preservation Coordinator  
**RE:** **Civic Center Public Realm Plan Informational Item**

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## SUMMARY

The Civic Center Public Realm Plan is a new project led by the San Francisco Planning Department, which will create a comprehensive, long-term vision for improvements to the Civic Center's plazas, streets, and other public spaces. The Plan is an interagency effort managed by Planning in partnership with multiple City agencies including, San Francisco Public Works, San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, San Francisco Recreation & Parks, San Francisco Real Estate Division, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, San Francisco Department of Public Health, and the Office of Economic and Workforce Development. Coordination and partnerships with the Civic Center's numerous stakeholder groups will also be a key component of the Plan. The Plan is part of the City's larger initiative to improve the Civic Center as both a neighborhood gathering space and a public commons for all San Franciscans. This memo provides an overview of the Plan's scope in anticipation of informational presentations at the Historic Preservation Commission hearing on January 20, 2016 and the Planning Commission hearing on January 28, 2016.

## BACKGROUND

Since it was first conceived over a century-ago, numerous plans for improving the Civic Center's public realm have been created. The City's 1912 Beaux Arts plan for the Civic Center guided the location and design of buildings and public spaces into the 1950s. However, the Great Depression and World War II largely ceased major development under the original plan. Since the 1950s, numerous Civic Center plans have included proposals for the public realm. Civic Center Plaza, in particular, has been the subject of multiple unimplemented redesign schemes ever since the debut of its c. 1961 design.

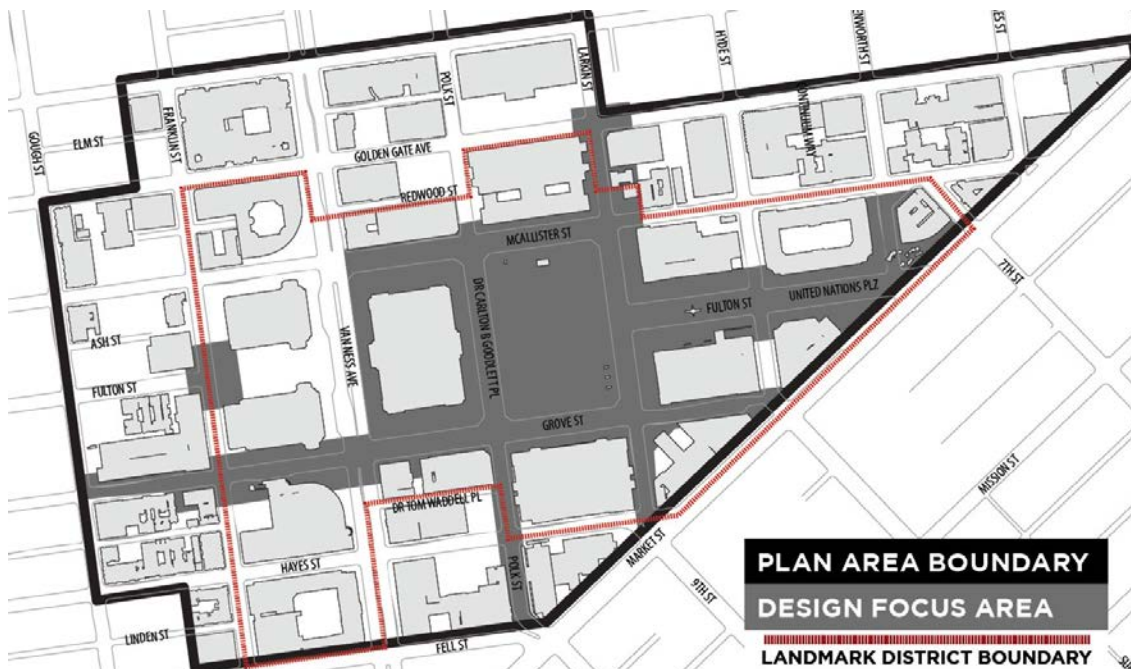
The City's primary focus in the area over recent decades has been the construction and renovation of its public buildings. The most recent plan to focus on the area's public realm is the 1998 "San Francisco Civic Center Historic District Improvement Project." Most of the project's design concepts have not been implemented. Since then, multiple departments have created design plans for individual public spaces within the Civic Center, but the City currently lacks a modern comprehensive plan that ensures a cohesive and coordinated approach to public realm design.

During the Civic Center's centennial in 2015, the City advanced a variety of plans and smaller-scale projects that analyze and propose improvements to the area. Concurrently, 4,000 new housing units have been added to the planning pipeline for the area immediately south of the Civic Center, per the 2007 Market & Octavia Area Plan. Further, a revitalized Central Market has seen thousands of new jobs move into the area along Market Street. The area's rapidly growing residential and worker population, when combined with the existing population in the Tenderloin and other nearby neighborhoods, will place increasing demands on the Civic Center's limited public space. As a result, there has been a growing realization that the time is ripe for a renewed long-term vision for the Civic Center's public realm that takes into account the modern aspirations and needs of the City.

The Civic Center Public Realm Plan will coordinate with other City projects to create a unified vision for improvements to the Civic Center's streets, plazas, and other public spaces. It will build partnerships and seek input from the numerous community groups, cultural organizations, residents, workers, and other stakeholders in the Civic Center. Although the Plan will be led by Planning, it will be an interdepartmental project with a goal of creating a cohesive and coordinated City approach to any long-term design changes within the Civic Center's public realm.

## PLAN AREA

The plan area is roughly bounded by Gough Street, Golden Gate Avenue, Market Street and Fell Street and encompasses the San Francisco Civic Center Landmark District. See map below. Shaded areas on the map have been identified via scoping as special focus areas for design work – these focus areas are also listed on Page 5 of this memo.



## HISTORIC DESIGNATION

The Civic Center was listed as a San Francisco Landmark District under Article 10 of the Planning Code in 1994, and portions of this district were previously listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978 and as a National Historic Landmark District in 1987. Planning completed a survey of historic landscape features in the district in 2012-2015 as part of the Civic Center Cultural Landscape Inventory, which was adopted by the Historic Preservation Commission on September 16, 2015.

## RELATED EFFORTS

The Civic Center Public Realm Plan will coordinate and build off of parallel efforts in the area, including those summarized below:

### *Civic Center Cultural Landscape Inventory*

The Civic Center Public Realm Plan will use the recently completed Civic Center Cultural Landscape Inventory (CCCLI) as a resource to inform design decisions within the area's public realm. For more information on the CCCLI, visit:

<http://www.sf-planning.org/index.aspx?page=3878>

### *Civic Center Sustainable Utilities District Plan*

Completed by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission in 2015, the Civic Center Sustainable Utilities District Plan sets forth a vision for transforming the Civic Center into a vital, active area that minimizes its impact on the natural environment by reducing water and energy consumption. The Civic Center Public Realm Plan will investigate ways to incorporate these concepts into the public realm. For more information visit:

<http://sfwater.org/index.aspx?page=739>

### *Van Ness & Market Plan Update ("The Hub")*

The area immediately to the south of the Civic Center near the Market Street and Van Ness Avenue intersection is projected to experience a great deal of growth and change over the coming years. Planning's study of this area will analyze the potential for zoning and policy refinements that better ensure the area's growth supports the City's goals for housing, transportation, the public realm, and the arts. Work on the Civic Center Public Realm Plan and the Van Ness and Market plan update will be closely coordinated to ensure a cohesive public realm vision is developed for the greater area.

### *Civic Center Playgrounds Improvements*

San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department is partnering with The Trust for Public Land to transform Civic Center Plaza's playgrounds. The Civic Center Public Realm Plan will work to incorporate the new playgrounds into a cohesive and unified design concept for improvements to Civic Center Plaza. For more information on the playground improvements, visit:

<http://sfrecpark.org/project/civic-center-playgrounds-improvement-project-tpl-partnership/>

## Other related plans:

*Central Market/Tenderloin Strategy*

<http://investsf.org/neighborhoods/cmtlstrategy/>

*Van Ness Avenue Bus Rapid Transit*

<http://www.sfcta.org/delivering-transportation-projects/van-ness-avenue-bus-rapid-transit-home>

*SFMTA Muni Forward (19-Polk and 5-Fulton Projects)*

<https://www.sfmta.com/projects-planning/projects/muni-forward-0>

*Polk Streetscape Project*

<https://www.sfmta.com/projects-planning/projects/polk-streetscape-project>

*Better Market Street*

<http://www.bettermarketstreetsf.org/>

## PLAN COMPONENTS

The following components will make up the Civic Center Public Realm Plan:

### *Public Life Study*

The Plan will include a thorough observation-based study on how people use the Civic Center's public realm. The study will analyze how many people use the Civic Center's public realm, the age and gender of people who use it, what spaces they use or do not use, what activities they partake in, and how long they stay. This will highlight important opportunities for design and challenges that may need a coordinated interagency response. Combining this data along with robust public outreach will result in a Public Life Study that serves as both an existing conditions analysis document and a framework for conceptual design. Findings will serve as the basis for developing and testing preliminary ideas for improvements through temporary, physical installations.

### *Streetscape Design Standards*

The Plan will develop contextually-appropriate locations and design palettes for the following amenities compatible with historic district guidelines:

- Lighting
- Street trees
- Crosswalks
- Green infrastructure
- Corner bulb-outs
- Intersection treatments
- Paving materials
- Way-finding signs
- Sidewalk landscaping
- Seating
- Activity-generating public amenities (kiosks, interactive art installations, etc.)

### *Transportation Infrastructure Upgrade Plan*

The Plan will analyze upgrades to the transportation infrastructure throughout the plan area, including:

- Roadway paving treatments
- Traffic lane striping
- Curbside parking and loading
- Bicycle facilities
- Bike share station location(s)
- Transit island(s)

### *Activation Plan*

The Plan will identify and support opportunities for enhancing and invigorating the Civic Center's public spaces in the following ways:

#### *New Active Uses in Public Spaces:*

The Plan will consider how to strategically add new uses that help to enliven the Civic Center's public spaces.

#### *Brooks Hall & Bill Graham Civic Auditorium:*

The Plan will study ways to increase activation and utilization of Brooks Hall and Bill Graham Civic Auditorium.

#### *Building Façade Augmentation:*

To improve the pedestrian experience, the Plan may consider new signs, lighting, art, and entry points for public buildings. Changes will be evaluated for their impact on the historic character of the district and individual landmarks.

#### *Stewardship & Programming Agreements:*

The Plan will seek to further develop stewardship agreements with Civic Center cultural and arts organizations to ensure new or redesigned public spaces are properly activated with day-to-day programming and special events.

### *Focus Areas Designs*

The Plan will develop 30% conceptual designs for key public spaces and streets within the Civic Center. The following focus areas have been identified during scoping:

- Grove Street (Gough to Market)
- Polk Street (McAllister to Market)
- Larkin Street (Golden Gate to Market)
- Fulton Street (Larkin to Hyde and the Franklin Street intersection)
- Alleyways (Various, TBD)
- Civic Center Plaza (including adjacent streets and underground spaces)
- United Nations Plaza

### *Implementation Strategy:*

The Plan will develop a long-term funding and phasing strategy for implementation of proposed improvements.

## **OUTREACH**

The project team is in the process of conducting early stakeholder outreach to Civic Center institutions, cultural and arts organizations, government agencies, and neighborhood groups. A series of community outreach and engagement events are being planned, starting in Spring 2016.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

The project scope includes environmental review and the Planning Department anticipates preparing a full environmental impact report for the Plan.

## **PLAN SCHEDULE**

Planning has proposed the following schedule for the Plan's development:

JAN. 2016 – APR. 2016:	Finalize Scoping and Contracting
MAY 2016 – SEP. 2016:	Existing Conditions and Public Life Study
OCT. 2016 – JAN. 2017:	Conceptual Design Development
FEB. 2017 – MAY 2017:	Design Refinement & Review
MAY 2017 – JUNE 2019:	Environmental Review
JUNE 2019 – JULY 2019:	Plan Adoption Hearings

Planning anticipates issuing three RFPs for consultant work; for the public life study, for conceptual design development, and for environmental review. During the design phases, the project team will bring preliminary design concepts before various City review bodies for discussion and comment, including the Architectural Review Committee of the Historic Preservation Commission. Additional informational hearings will be scheduled to provide updates on the Plan at major milestones.

## **REQUIRED COMMISSION ACTION**

This item is being presented for informational purposes only. No formal action by the Historic Preservation Commission is required.

**RECOMMENDATION:** None – Informational Item Only