

Workshop #1 Summary

Imagining a Better Neighborhood: What Makes a Great Neighborhood
May 3, 2000

On May 3, 2000, the San Francisco Planning Department hosted the first community workshop at Daniel Webster Elementary School for the Central Waterfront Neighborhood. The workshop had three primary goals:

- Introduce the community to the Better Neighborhoods 2002 project
- Begin to discuss some ideas of what makes a great neighborhood with participants and to gather their thoughts about them.
- Begin to discuss how we can help make the neighborhood the best place it can be.

About 50 local residents attended, in addition to project staff. The workshop began with refreshments and an informal discussion of eight elements that help make a neighborhood great:

- Its own Special Character.
- Being its own special place, while also Part of the Whole.
- The ability to Get Around Easily by a variety of transportation choices.
- The ability to Walk to Shops for your everyday needs.
- Safe Streets, with low crime and appropriate traffic levels.
- Gathering Places for people to meet one another.
- A variety of Housing Choices for a variety of different people.
- Good City Services such as libraries, parks and street maintenance.

Following the informal discussion, Planning Department staff described the Better Neighborhoods 2002 process and provided their thoughts about the eight elements. Then, participants assembled into five small groups to discuss how the elements related to them.

The following summary attempts to capture the essence of workshop participants' ideas, describing major themes that emerged in the discussions. These summaries do not represent the consensus of the neighborhood nor direction for planners, but are a starting point for further discussion and refinement at the next workshops. A detailed transcript of all the workshop notes is available by emailing or calling Project Coordinator Ken Rich at 558-6345.

Special Character

Participants had a multitude of ideas of how they would define the "special character" of the Central Waterfront. Many people described it in terms of its physical characteristics: the Waterfront itself, industrial buildings, and beautiful residential buildings in Dogpatch. Others recognized the interesting history of the neighborhood with shipyards, ironworks and working class housing immediately adjacent to one another. A majority of participants were interested in creating more character in the neighborhood by building upon existing elements and adding new activities such as cafes and restaurants. At the same time, a majority were also concerned that their neighborhood not be turned into something "fake" like Pier 39 or overdeveloped with highrises. Some specific points about Special Character that were mentioned include:

- Multicultural.

- Lively night scene.
- Can walk around day and night.
- Housing for artists.
- Waterfront uses.
- Waterfront access, real and potential.
- Pier 70, including historic district and structures.
- Dogpatch housing.
- Cranes.
- Elements of the past.
- I.M. Scott school.
- Authentic character.
- East of Third/west of Third dichotomy.
- Current industrial character.

Part of the Whole

Participants feel like a part of the City because of the view of downtown. The Central Waterfront, however, currently feels somewhat isolated. The 3rd Street light rail line and increased development at Mission Bay and in the neighborhood will change this perception, drawing the neighborhood more directly into the whole city. Some specific points about Part of the Whole that were mentioned include:

- Isolated by freeways, hard to get to rest of city.
- Lack community attractions.
- Quiet, safe haven.
- Light rail will connect it to the city.
- Need variety and a good mix of income levels.
- Third Street should be a southern entrance to the city.
- Accept share of social service burden.
- Protect from surrounding traffic burdens.
- Connected to bay and bay trails.
- Need to be a place, not just a place to pass through.
- Working class part of the city.

Getting Around Easily

While the neighborhood has good freeway access, many people are concerned with lack of frequency and reliability on MUNI routes. Bicyclists also face serious problems, with a steep hill on one side and a very bike-unfriendly 3rd Street on the other. The hill also poses problems for pedestrians, especially since all the services within walking distance are atop the hill. Some specific points about Getting Around Easily that were mentioned include:

- Good freeway access.
- More bike lanes.
- More and better transit.
- Extend historic E line to 20th Street.
- Transit is not adequate for development.

Walk to Shops

Most participants would like to see more shops within walking distance, particularly on 3rd Street. Currently, people feel they have to go to other neighborhoods – often by driving there – to get what they need. Participants liked neighborhoods such as

West Portal, Noe Valley, and Clement Street, where they could go to various stores on one trip. Some specific points about Walk to Shops that were mentioned include:

- Not enough services in neighborhood.
- People have to drive elsewhere to services.
- Not enough shops open at night.
- Should be like Noe Valley, Glen Park, West Portal or Haight
- New development does not encourage or permit retail.
- Scale of Safeway at Potrero Center is overwhelming.
- Need more retail along 3rd Street.

Safe Streets

Some participants felt unsafe on neighborhood streets because they felt that there are not enough other people out walking and keeping "eyes" on the street. Participants were especially concerned with the blocks under and over the freeway, where lighting may be poor. People were also concerned with the speed of traffic on 3rd Street and the difficulty of crossing it. Some specific points about Safe Streets that were mentioned include:

- Need adequate sidewalks.
- Need more people out walking to provide "eyes" on the street.
- Need more ground level retail space for more visibility and safety.
- More pay phones and street trees.
- Need community policing.
- Under the freeways feels dangerous.
- Hard to get to Caltrain.
- Crossing 3rd Street does not feel safe.
- Conflicts between residential and industrial uses.
- Need safe bike lanes.

Gathering Places

Participants felt that there are currently few gathering places in the neighborhood other than Esprit Park and Agua Vista Park. Participants wanted to see development of more parks, cafes and restaurants and greater access to the waterfront. Some specific points about Gathering Places that were mentioned include:

- Currently, there are no gathering places.
- There are no benches, fountains or cafés.
- Not many parks.
- Agua Vista Park, Jackson Park.
- Daily Scoop.
- City should purchase Esprit Park.
- Need children-friendly open spaces such as playgrounds and tot lots.
- Need a recreation area for rollerblading and skating.
- Need bayside bike trail separate from traffic.
- Pier 70 could be like Marina Green.
- Need public and private spaces, including sidewalk café tables.

Housing Choices

Most participants recognized a need for more affordable housing in the neighborhood, but they did not want to see any highrises or low-income-only projects such as the Potrero Projects. They also felt that the live-work lofts being

developed in the neighborhood do not fit into the character of the place, nor do they contribute to the neighborhood in a positive way. Some specific points about Housing Choices that were mentioned include:

- Too many condos in neighborhood.
- Need more affordable family units.
- Slow the development of live-work lofts.
- Build more apartments with open space.
- Need both more homeowner opportunities and more rental properties.
- Keep existing residential character.
- Introduce density along transit corridor.
- Create buffer between industrial and residential areas.
- Allow less than 1:1 parking for units under 600 square feet.
- No high-rises; neighborhood scale of 40-foot heights.
- Need greater variety of housing.
- No more public housing projects.
- Live/work should fit into neighborhood character, including setbacks, light, pedestrian access, no blank walls.

City Services

Participants do not feel that they have gotten their fair share of City services. They would especially like to see a police station, more and better parks, better shoreline access, day care, better MUNI service, improved street amenities and extended library hours. They are concerned that the pace of change in their area is extremely fast and that no one is coordinating projects or looking out for their interests. Some specific points about City Services that were mentioned include:

- New development should pay its own way.
- Need more parks.
- Need satellite police station.
- Hate public housing projects.
- Streets are a mess.
- Need more waterfront access.
- Need improved MUNI service to and within downtown, plus more frequency and reliability.
- Preserve and retain Scott School.
- Expanded library hours.