



# SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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## Planning Commission Resolution No. 18626

HEARING DATE: MAY 17, 2012

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*Project Name:* Amendments relating to:  
Parking, Awning, Signs, Exposure, Open Space, and Limited  
Conforming Uses.

*Case Number:* 2011.0532T [Board File No. 11-0548]

*Initiated by:* Supervisor Chiu / Introduced May 3, 2011

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*Recommendation:* **Recommend Approval with Modifications Of "Phase Three"  
Including the Topics of Parking, Opens Space for Commercial Uses,  
Gross Floor Area and Floor Area Ratio, Streetscape Improvements,  
Transportation Management, Powers of the Zoning Administrator, and  
the Van Ness SUD and SSD**

RECOMMENDING THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ADOPT A PROPOSED ORDINANCE WITH MODIFICATIONS THAT WOULD AMEND THE SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING CODE BY REPEALING SECTIONS 136.2, 136.3, 158, 187, 249.15, 263.2, 263.3, 602.25, 602.26, 607.3 AND 607.4 AND AMENDING VARIOUS OTHER CODE SECTIONS TO (1) INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF PRINCIPALLY PERMITTED PARKING SPACES FOR DWELLINGS IN RC-4 AND C-3 DISTRICTS, (2) MAKE OFF-STREET PARKING REQUIREMENTS IN THE VAN NESS SPECIAL USE DISTRICT AND RC-3 DISTRICTS CONSISTENT WITH THOSE OF RC-4 DISTRICTS, (3) ELIMINATE MINIMUM PARKING REQUIREMENTS FOR THE CHINATOWN MIXED USE DISTRICTS AND NORTH BEACH NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS, (4) ALLOW EXCEPTIONS FROM REQUIRED PARKING UNDER SPECIFIED CIRCUMSTANCES, (5) AMEND THE RESTRICTIONS ON OFF-STREET PARKING RATES AND EXTEND THEM TO ADDITIONAL ZONING DISTRICTS, (6) REVISE SIGN, AWNING, CANOPY AND MARQUEE CONTROLS IN SPECIFIED ZONING DISTRICTS, (7) INCREASE THE PERMITTED USE SIZE FOR LIMITED CORNER COMMERCIAL USES IN RTO AND RM DISTRICTS, AND ALLOW REACTIVATION OF LAPSED LIMITED COMMERCIAL USES IN R DISTRICTS, (8) REVISE THE BOUNDARIES OF AND MODIFY PARKING AND SCREENING REQUIREMENTS IN THE WASHINGTON-BROADWAY AND WATERFRONT SPECIAL USE DISTRICTS, (9) MODIFY CONTROLS FOR USES AND ACCESSORY USES IN COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL-COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS, (10) PERMIT CERTAIN EXCEPTIONS FROM EXPOSURE AND OPEN SPACE REQUIREMENTS FOR HISTORIC BUILDINGS, AND (11) MODIFY CONFORMITY REQUIREMENTS IN VARIOUS USE

**DISTRICTS; ADOPTING FINDINGS, INCLUDING ENVIRONMENTAL FINDINGS, SECTION 302 FINDINGS, AND FINDINGS OF CONSISTENCY WITH THE GENERAL PLAN AND THE PRIORITY POLICIES OF PLANNING CODE SECTION 101.1.**

**PREAMBLE**

Whereas, on May 3, 2011 Supervisor Chiu introduced a proposed Ordinance under Board of Supervisors (hereinafter "Board") File Number 11-0548 which would amend the San Francisco Planning Code by repealing Sections 136.2, 136.3, 158, 187, 249.15, 263.2, 263.3, 602.25, 602.26, 607.3 and 607.4 and amending various other Code sections to (1) increase the amount of principally permitted parking spaces for dwellings in RC-4 and C-3 Districts, (2) make off-street parking requirements in the Van Ness Special Use District and RC-3 Districts consistent with those of RC-4 Districts, (3) eliminate minimum parking requirements for the Chinatown Mixed Use Districts and North Beach Neighborhood Commercial Districts, (4) allow exceptions from required parking under specified circumstances, (5) amend the restrictions on off-street parking rates and extend them to additional zoning districts, (6) revise sign, awning, canopy and marquee controls in specified zoning districts, (7) increase the permitted use size for limited corner commercial uses in RTO and RM districts, and allow reactivation of lapsed limited commercial uses in R districts, (8) revise the boundaries of and modify parking and screening requirements in the Washington-Broadway and Waterfront Special Use Districts, (9) modify controls for uses and accessory uses in Commercial and Residential-Commercial Districts, (10) permit certain exceptions from exposure and open space requirements for historic buildings, and (11) modify conformity requirements in various use districts; and

Whereas, on December 15, 2011, the San Francisco Planning Commission (hereinafter "Commission") conducted a duly noticed public hearing at a regularly scheduled meeting to consider the proposed Ordinance; and

Whereas on February 8, 2012, the legislative sponsor, Board President David Chiu, sent the Commission a memorandum requesting that the Commission not consider certain topics from the proposed Ordinance as it is his intend to remove the following topics from the proposed Ordinance: The C-3 parking and FAR changes, changes to Planning Code Section 155(g) having to do with the long term parking rate structure, and proposed changes to Port Property and the expansion of the Waterfront Advisory Committee.

Whereas on March 1, 2012, the Planning Commission considered a portion of the proposed Ordinance, herein referred to as "Phase One", covering the subject areas of Clerical and Minor Modifications, Transfer of Development Rights (TDRS), Limited Commercial Uses, Bike Parking, and Signs; and

Whereas, at this same hearing the Commission requested that the remainder of the proposed Ordinance be brought back for two later hearings; and

Whereas, the Commission requested that the next hearing consider the "Phase Two" topics of the same proposed Ordinance including the topics of changes to Automotive Uses, Limited Corner Commercial Uses (LCCUs), Accessory Uses, Non-Conforming Uses, and Washington Broadway and Waterfront SUDs, and the Van Ness Avenue SUD and SSD; and

Whereas, the Commission further requested that the remainder of the topics of the proposed Ordinance be considered at a later hearing called "Phase Three" that would include the topics of changes to Parking, Opens Space for Commercial Uses, Gross Floor Area and Floor Area Ratio, Streetscape Improvements, Transportation Management, and the Powers of the Zoning Administrator; and

Whereas, at the March 1, 2012 hearing, the Commission recommended approval with modifications of Phase One in Resolution Number 18553; and

Whereas, at the May 3, 2012 hearing, the Commission requested that the proposed Changes to the Van Ness SUD which include parking ratio modifications, the elimination of the Van Ness Sign District and the Van Ness Special Sign District for illumination be brought back to the Commission under Phase Three; and

Whereas, at the May 3, 2012 hearing, the Commission recommended approval with modifications of Phase Two in Resolution Number 18615; and

Whereas, this hearing is to consider the topics described as "Phase Three"; and

Whereas, the proposed zoning changes have been determined to be exempt from environmental review under the General Rule Exclusion (Section 15061(b)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines); 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 the applicant, Department staff, and other interested parties; and

Whereas, the 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 the Planning Commission hereby recommends that the Board of Supervisors **approve with modifications** Phase Three of the proposed ordinance. Specifically, the Commission recommends the following modifications:

**Clerical Modifications:**

1. Section 249.5(a) should also reference map SU02, the North of Market Residential SUD is on both SU01 and SU02.
2. Section 309.1(b)(1)(F) references 827(a)(8)(AO(ii), it should reference 827(a)(8)(A)(ii)
3. Section 151(c)(4) should be amended to read as follows:

“In all districts other than NC, 15 spaces or seven percent of the total gross floor area of the structure or development, which is ever greater, *where no other spaces are required by this Section.*”

This section was moved to Section 151 from another Section of the Code and reformatted. In the process, the underlined portion was inadvertently deleted.

**Substantive Changes:**

**Parking**

1. Accept the changes proposed in Supervisor Chiu’s letter dated April 26, 2012 that remove the minimum parking controls and set maximum parking controls in RC Districts and Van Ness Avenue SUD.

**Streetscape Improvements**

2. Integrate the changed outline in Exhibit A of this Motion, which cover Section 138.1 of the Planning Code.

**Powers of the ZA**

3. Amend Section 161 of the Planning Code to allow the Zoning Administrator to grant exceptions to off-street parking requirements in C-2 Districts per Section 307. This recommended change would result in allowing administrative exceptions to off-street parking requirements in all districts except the RH and RM districts.

**Van Ness Avenue**

4. Do not delete the Van Ness Special Sign District from the Planning Code under the proposed Ordinance; this issue should be studied further and possibly introduced under separate legislation.
5. Remove the provision in the Van Ness Special Sign District that allows General Advertising Signs within the Van Ness SSD.
6. Add a grandfathering clause to the legislation that allows projects that have already been approved by the Planning Commission but not yet vested to be exempt from any parking changes on Van Ness Avenue. This includes both commercial and residential projects.

**FINDINGS**

Having reviewed the materials identified in the preamble above, and having heard all testimony and arguments, this Commission finds, concludes, and determines as follows:

1. San Francisco’s Planning Code has provided for reduced parking requirements in dense and transit-rich neighborhoods since the 1960s, as a way of reducing traffic congestion, encouraging walking, cycling, and public transit, and making efficient use of scarce land;

2. In 1973, the San Francisco City Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors adopted the "Transit First Policy", giving top priority to public transit investments as the centerpiece of the city's transportation policy and adopting street capacity and parking policies to discourage increases in automobile traffic;
3. Off-street parking facilities increase building costs, which in turn are transferred to costs of housing and doing business. As a land use, off-street parking facilities compete with and displace land uses that provide greater social and economic benefit to the city;
4. A basic assumption of the Transportation Element is that a desirable living environment and a prosperous business environment cannot be maintained if traffic levels continue to increase in any significant way. A balance must be restored to the city's transportation system, and various methods must be used to control and reshape the impact of automobiles on the city. This includes limiting the city's parking capacity, especially long-term parking in commercial areas;
5. On October 26, 2010 the Board of Supervisors adopted the goal of having 20% of trips by bike by the year 2020;
6. The City of San Francisco's Housing Element seeks to remove unnecessary constraints to the construction and rehabilitation of housing;
7. Existing buildings contribute to the unique character of San Francisco. Reusing buildings, rather than demolishing and rebuilding them, can preserve the built character of neighborhoods, as well as foster sustainability by conserving the energy and materials embodied in these buildings.
8. Small commercial uses, although often nonconforming, tend to provide convenience goods and services on a retail basis to meet the frequent and recurring needs of neighborhood residents within a short distance of their homes;
9. Small businesses that combine office, production, retail, and even residential uses are increasingly common in San Francisco, but frequently do not fit into traditional zoning categories. Creating more flexibility in zoning around accessory uses will help add to the vibrancy of the City's neighborhoods and to the City's diverse economic base;
10. Over the years, the Planning Code has been amended and expanded. While many of these changes have been necessary to address emerging issues and changing policy in the City, the current Planning Code can be overly complex and redundant;
11. **General Plan Compliance.** The proposed Ordinance is consistent with the following Objectives and Policies of the General Plan:

**I. HOUSING ELEMENT**

**OBJECTIVE 1**

IDENTIFY AND MAKE AVAILABLE FOR DEVELOPMENT ADEQUATE SITES TO MEET THE CITY'S HOUSING NEEDS, ESPECIALLY PERMANENTLY AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

**POLICY 1.6**

Consider greater flexibility in number and size of units within established building envelopes in community based planning processes, especially if it can increase the number of affordable units in multi-family structures.

**POLICY 1.10**

Support new housing projects, especially affordable housing, where households can easily rely on public transportation, walking and bicycling for the majority of daily trips.

*Phases Three of the proposed ordinance will make it easier to build more housing in transit rich neighborhoods by excluding dwelling unit density calculations in C-3 Zoning Districts.*

**OBJECTIVE 10**

Ensure a streamlined, yet thorough, and transparent decision-making process.

**Policy 10.2**

Implement planning process improvements to both reduce undue project delays and provide clear information to support community review.

*Phase Three of the proposed Ordinance would stream line the approval process by expanding the ZA's authority by allowing him to waive Dwelling Unit Exposure requirements for Article 11 buildings, consistent with the ZA's current authority to waive Dwelling Unit Exposure requirements for Article 10 buildings.*

**OBJECTIVE 11**

SUPPORT AND RESPECT THE DIVERSE AND DISTINCT CHARACTER OF SAN FRANCISCO NEIGHBORHOODS.

**Policy 11.7**

Respect San Francisco's historic fabric, by preserving landmark buildings and ensuring consistency with historic districts.

*Phase Three of the proposed ordinance makes it easier to convert existing buildings into residential units by granting the Zoning Administrator greater powers to waive certain Planning Code requirements.*

**OBJECTIVE 12**

BALANCE HOUSING GROWTH WITH ADEQUATE INFRASTRUCTURE THAT SERVES THE CITY'S GROWING POPULATION

**Policy 12.1**

Encourage new housing that relies on transit use and environmentally sustainable patterns of movement.

*Phases Three of the proposed ordinance recognizes the dense transit rich nature of many of San Francisco's neighborhoods and removes or significantly reduces minimum parking requirements to encourage transit use and other forms of transportation.*

**II. TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT**

**OBJECTIVE 1**

MEET THE NEEDS OF ALL RESIDENTS AND VISITORS FOR SAFE, CONVENIENT AND INEXPENSIVE TRAVEL WITHIN SAN FRANCISCO AND BETWEEN THE CITY AND OTHER PARTS OF THE REGION WHILE MAINTAINING THE HIGH QUALITY LIVING ENVIRONMENT OF THE BAY AREA

**Policy 1.2**

Ensure the safety and comfort of pedestrians throughout the city.

**Policy 1.3**

Give priority to public transit and other alternatives to the private automobile as the means of meeting San Francisco's transportation needs, particularly those of commuters.

*Phases Three of the proposed ordinance requires that projects of certain sizes implement the Better Street Plans, which enhances the pedestrian realm; and it allows the Zoning Administrator to reduce or waive required parking or loading for a project when the only feasible street frontage for a driveway or entrance to off-street parking or loading is located on a protected pedestrian-, cycling-, or transit-oriented street frontage, or the only feasible street frontage for a driveway or entrance to off-street parking or loading is located at a transit stops. Phases 3 also requires that more projects provide transportation brokerage service and transportation management plans, which helps achieve the City's goal of providing more alternatives to the private automobile. Phase 3 also includes Short term parking in FAR calculations in C-3 Districts, creating a disincentive for adding short term parking to new developments in C-3 Districts.*

**III. URBAN DESIGN ELEMENT**

**OBJECTIVE 1**

EMPHASIS OF THE CHARACTERISTIC PATTERN WHICH GIVES TO THE CITY AND ITS NEIGHBORHOODS AN IMAGE, A SENSE OF PURPOSE AND A MEANS OF ORIENTATION

**Policy 1.10**

Indicate the purposes of streets by adopting and implementing the Better Streets Plan, which identifies a hierarchy of street types and appropriate streetscape elements for each street type.

*Phase Three of the proposed ordinance would require more projects to remove encroachments into the public right-of-way in order to implement the City's Better Streets Plan.*

**IV. OPEN SPACE ELEMENT**

**OBJECTIVE 2**

DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN A DIVERSIFIED AND BALANCED CITYWIDE SYSTEM OF HIGH QUALITY PUBLIC OPEN SPACE.

**Policy 2.1**

Provide an adequate total quantity and equitable distribution of public open spaces throughout the City.

*Phases Three of the proposed ordinance would require buildings in the C-3 that are primarily retail to provide open space. This would help to increase the amount of open space available in the downtown core, which is an area of the City that has limited access to public open space.*

**V. VAN NESS AVENUE AREA PLAN**

**OBJECTIVE 8**

CREATE AN ATTRACTIVE STREET AND SIDEWALK SPACE WHICH CONTRIBUTES TO THE TRANSFORMATION OF VAN NESS AVENUE INTO A RESIDENTIAL BOULEVARD.

**Policy 8.11**

Permit general advertising signs, business signs and other identifying signs. Permitted signs should meet the following design criteria:

- Signs should not feature any flashing, blinking, fluctuating or otherwise animated light. Likewise, signs should not feature any moving parts.
- Wall signs shall not be less than 10 feet above grade and should not be higher than 45 feet above grade and should not be higher than the lowest residential window sill.
- Projecting signs and general advertising signs should not be higher than 36 feet. Projecting signs shall in no case project more than 4 feet over the sidewalk.
- General advertisement signs should conform to State Outdoor Advertisement regulations requiring that no advertising display shall be placed within 100 feet from another advertising display.
- Signs should not be placed in front of windows.

*Modifying the Ordinance so that the Van Ness Special Sign District is not removed is consistent with this policy of the Van Ness Area Plan. Further, removing the Van Ness Special Sign District for Illumination from the Planning Code and Zoning Map is also consistent with this policy of the Van Ness Area Plan, as it specifically prohibits flashing or blinking signs.*

**OBJECTIVE 9**

PROVIDE SAFE AND EFFICIENT MOVEMENT AMONG ALL USERS ON VAN NESS AVENUE.

**Policy 9.7**

Require residential parking at a ratio of one parking space per dwelling unit.

*The Commission acknowledges this policy and notes that it is in opposition to other policies in the General Plan that seek to reduce parking. The Commission hereby decides that removing the requirement of 1 to 1 parking along Van Ness Avenue is on-balance consistent with the City's General Plan and the mixed use high density character of Van Ness Avenue. This provision of the General Plan is out of date and is in contrast to the recent steps that the City has been taking to require less parking for all uses. Further, the City's Transit first policy prioritizes transit over automobile use and Van Ness is a major transit corridor. For this reason, the Commission recommends to adopt the portion of the proposed Ordinance that would remove the Van Ness Special Use District exception from the broader parking requirement for RC-4 districts, which are currently required at a ratio of 1 parking space to every 4 dwelling units. The Commission recommends adding a grandfathering clause to the legislation that allows projects that have already been approved by the Planning Commission but not yet vested to be exempt from this provision.*

12. The proposed replacement project is consistent with the eight General Plan priority policies set forth in Section 101.1 in that:

- A) The existing neighborhood-serving retail uses will be preserved and enhanced and future opportunities for resident employment in and ownership of such businesses will be enhanced:

*Phase Three of the proposed Ordinance will not negatively impact existing neighborhood-serving retail uses.*

- B) The existing housing and neighborhood character will be conserved and protected in order to preserve the cultural and economic diversity of our neighborhoods:

*Phase Three of the proposed Ordinance would remove minimum parking requirements from transit rich urban areas of the City*

- C) The City's supply of affordable housing will be preserved and enhanced:

*Phase Three of the proposed Ordinance will not have a negative impact on the City's supply of affordable housing.*

- D) The commuter traffic will not impede MUNI transit service or overburden our streets or neighborhood parking:

*Phase Three of the proposed Ordinance seeks to reduce the impact that private automobiles have on City streets by eliminating minimum parking requirements and replacing them with maximum parking requirements.*

- E) A diverse economic base will be maintained by protecting our industrial and service sectors from displacement due to commercial office development. And future opportunities for resident employment and ownership in these sectors will be enhanced:

*Phase Three of the proposed Ordinance would not adversely affect the industrial or service sectors or future opportunities for resident employment or ownership in these sectors.*

- F) The City will achieve the greatest possible preparedness to protect against injury and loss of life in an earthquake.

*Preparedness against injury and loss of life in an earthquake is unaffected by the proposed Ordinance. Any new construction or alteration associated with a use would be executed in compliance with all applicable construction and safety measures.*

- G) That landmark and historic buildings will be preserved:

*Phase Three of the proposed Ordinance would allow Landmark and historic buildings to be adaptively reused more easily by exempting them from certain provisions in the Planning Code, which would reduce the amount of change that is required to add housing to historic buildings and help preserve them for the future.*

- H) Parks and open space and their access to sunlight and vistas will be protected from development:

*The City's parks and open space and their access to sunlight and vistas would be unaffected by the proposed amendments. It is not anticipated that permits would be such that sunlight access, to public or private property, would be adversely impacted.*

I hereby certify that the Planning Commission ADOPTED the foregoing Resolution on May 17, 2012

Linda Avery  
Commission Secretary

AYES: Commissioners Borden, Fong, Miguel, Sugaya, Wu

NAYS: Commissioner Antonini

ABSENT: Commissioner Moore

ADOPTED: May 17, 2012