Contrasting Visions for Growth in Central SoMa

As the San Francisco Planning Department promotes the Draft Central SoMa Plan as a “model for sustainable growth,” will the 5th and Mission (5M) Project’s towering presence undermine or enhance the plan’s vision for the future of the neighborhood? STORY ON PAGE 6
As I write my first President’s column, I want to consider how our mission has both expanded and become increasingly relevant over Heritage’s 44 years.

We were founded during the dark days of 1970s urban renewal when blocks of historic Victorian buildings were being bulldozed. Simply put, we formed to save worthy historic buildings. Our early success impressed one generous family so much they gave San Francisco Heritage a grand Victorian house to maintain for the public’s benefit. The Haas-Lilienthal House has the distinction of being the only Victorian, house museum in the city, and we are working to make the Haas-Lilienthal House a better experience for the public, with enhanced interpretation, improved accessibility, and a bit of freshening up in the years to come.

Our definition of what is historic has kept pace with the evolution of the city -- and has changed a lot since 1971. Today we see that San Francisco is more than just a collection of “painted ladies”. It has significant buildings from many different periods, including a fine collection from the Modern era: The Crown Zellerbach building on Bush Street; Frank Lloyd Wright’s Morris Gift Shop (now the Xanadu Gallery) on Maiden Lane; the mid-century neighborhoods of Diamond Heights, including houses by famed developer Joseph Eichler; and the individual houses designed by William Wurster, Joseph Esherick, and Gardner Dailey, among others. These buildings provide architectural variety and richness throughout San Francisco.

As we widen our understanding of what constitutes San Francisco’s built heritage, we have also come to realize that saving buildings is not enough. If the people and activities that animate those buildings disappear, the city is sadly diminished. Bars and restaurants hold a special place in the life of San Francisco, and some have shaped its character as much as buildings have. Our Legacy Bars and Restaurants initiative is designating venerable old establishments to acknowledge that places like Red’s Java Hut, the Pied Piper Bar, Tadich Grill, and It’s Tops Coffee Shop give irreplaceable character to San Francisco.

Neighborhoods such as the Mission, SoMa, Japantown, and the Castro, with their distinctive Latino, Filipino, Japanese, and gay cultures, are part of our heritage, too. If these groups are displaced, the whole of San Francisco loses.

Protecting the built environment, though never easy, is relatively straightforward. Preserving intangible elements like culture and community, however, is much more challenging and uncharted. Both are necessary to sustain the San Francisco that we all love.

Our job at San Francisco Heritage must continue to grow, not only to keep San Francisco beautiful, but also to keep its character authentic and its history vital.
Welcome Renee Cohn

Heritage is pleased to announce that Renee Cohn has joined our staff as the new full-time Communications and Programs Manager. Renee brings a unique set of skills to the position, with a BA in Fine Art from the University of Southern California and an MS in Architecture, Heritage Preservation and Conservation from the University of Minnesota.

As a Bay Area native with a family history in San Francisco dating back to the turn of the 20th century, Renee has a strong passion for the heritage and architecture of the city. Her interest in architecture and preservation grew while at USC, and she honed her skills in the preservation program at the University of Minnesota. As a graduate student, Renee worked for the City of Saint Paul Planning Department as an intern to the Heritage Preservation Commission.

Renee is excited to contribute to Heritage and continue to expand its reach throughout the city. In this new position with Heritage, Renee oversees the organization’s social media platforms, Heritage News, the Legacy Bars & Restaurants program and, in the summer and fall, will coordinate Discover SF! and the annual lecture series.

Intern Profile: Chris Larsen

Christopher Larsen is an Architecture and Interdisciplinary Studies student focusing on architectural preservation at Bennington College, in Vermont. In his third year at Bennington, Chris has taken on the challenge of preserving and re-envisioning a neglected 1830’s Greek Revival brick house, supported academically and through community participation.

Chris attributes his interest in historic preservation and restoration to his great-grandfather, Bill, and his great-granduncle, Dale; both founders of the Dale and Martha Hawk Museum, located just outside Cando, North Dakota. “The Hawk” is a rural-life museum where Dale collected farm equipment and small-town buildings and moved them to his farm in order to preserve them.

Born and raised in Oakland, Chris attended Maybeck High School in Berkeley, where he had the opportunity to travel to New Orleans and New York City. These experiences helped foster an excitement and engagement with historic preservation like no other. Working in estate sales and landscape design, Chris encountered slivers of historic preservation that inspired him to further explore the profession while in college. For Chris, working with Heritage is key to understanding the world of architectural and cultural preservation in San Francisco.
The waterfront boasts one of the richest and most compelling collections of historic resources anywhere in San Francisco. Following the city’s proud tradition of citizen activism, San Francisco voters approved Proposition H in 1990, which required the development of a plan that would guide future rehabilitation and development along the city’s waterfront. The resulting Waterfront Land Use Plan (WLUP), adopted in 1997, set in motion a series of projects that have spurred the port’s continuing revival, including rehabilitation projects at the Ferry Building, Piers 1 ½, 3 and 5, and Piers 15-17 (the Exploratorium’s new home). Projects in the works include the redevelopment of Pier 70, including the 20th-Street Historic Core, Crane Cove Park, and many other structures associated with San Francisco’s historic shipbuilding industry.

Late last year, the Port of San Francisco released a 14-year review of the WLUP and will begin updating the plan in 2015 (Proposition H mandates an update every five years). Over 120 waterfront improvement projects are profiled in the draft report, including 19 preservation projects that have benefited from the federal historic tax-credit program. This Draft WLUP Review is an opportunity to look back on past successes and failures, and to strategize for future challenges and opportunities. With the passage of Proposition B in June 2014, mandating voter approval of any project that would exceed height limits, the public will continue to be an essential arbiter of future development decisions on the city’s waterfront.

The Draft WLUP Review recommends against the Port entering long-term leases of Piers 28 and 26 (above, left to right) due to their deteriorating condition and prohibitive repair costs.

**Diversity Along the Waterfront**

As described in the WLUP, San Francisco’s Port can be divided into five sub-areas: Fisherman’s Wharf, the Northeast Waterfront, the Ferry Building area, South Beach/China Basin, and the Southern Waterfront. In addition to geography, these segments are differentiated by their current and historic uses.

The city’s historic fishing industry has been based at Fisherman’s Wharf for over a century. A central goal of the WLUP is to support the continued viability of the industry, especially as family-owned boats face escalating costs and out-of-state competition. The Northeast Waterfront, extending from Pier 35 to Pier 7 along the Embarcadero, was historically a maritime and industrial district, but is now a collection of urban neighborhoods.

More than any other project, the Ferry Building and its environs have come to symbolize the port’s renaissance, instantly becoming a world-class destination following the landmark’s rehabilitation in 2003. In the former industrial district of South Beach/China Basin, defined as Pier 22 ½ to Seawall Lot 345, new neighborhoods and commercial uses have been built next to new transportation and open-space linkages. Finally, the Southern Waterfront from Pier 70 to India Basin represents a long history of shipbuilding and repair. The WLUP has resulted in a series of strategies to rehabilitate these historic buildings and help sustain the area’s longstanding cargo-and ship-repair operations, including pending projects at Pier 70 and Sea Wall Lot 337 (Mission Rock).

**Challenges Ahead**

While the Port has successfully completed scores of projects since the plan’s approval, vexing challenges remain — including sea-level rise, a deteriorating seawall, structural deficiencies, and insufficient funding to address these and other escalating capital needs.

The seawall, built over 37 years beginning in 1879, was constructed using a variety of methods in different locations. Although portions have been repaired, a great deal remains unknown about the condition of the entire seawall. The projected sea-level rise of up to 24 inches by 2050, and the likelihood of a major seismic event in the next 30 years, cast significant doubt on the seawall’s ability to safeguard against flooding. Accordingly, the Draft WLUP Review recommends that the Port undertake a detailed assessment of the seawall to inform future plan updates.
As observed in Port City – Michael Corbett’s 2010 history of the city’s waterfront – “San Francisco boasts the most intact early-twentieth-century finger-pier waterfront in the country.” Some piers are supported by poured-in-place caisson piles and would require significant (and expensive) repairs. The historic finger piers are particularly vulnerable to deterioration — and possible demolition — as many suffer from salt-water intrusion and structural damage with insufficient funding for their stabilization and repair.

The Draft WLUP Review recommends against “leasing finger piers for more than 35 years without a solution to sea-level rise... This is a current practice of Port staff that could be formalized by a Port Commission policy.” Heritage’s comments on the Draft WLUP Review, submitted in January 2015, strongly object to the recommended policy because it would effectively preclude major private investment in finger piers and culminate in their demolition. Moreover, the proposed 35-year limit on leasing finger piers would eliminate access to federal rehabilitation tax credits — one of the most valuable financial incentives available for would-be preservation projects.

Looking to the Future

Before imposing lease limits, Heritage urges the Port to first complete conditions-assessments, feasibility studies, and long-term preservation plans for the city’s remaining historic finger piers. This information would help facilitate the Draft WLUP Review’s recommendation for the Port Commission to establish criteria for prioritizing rehabilitation efforts. In conjunction with site-specific analyses, we also encourage the Port to engage the State Lands Commission to allow a broader range of uses on the waterfront that could better accommodate and co-exist with sea-level rise, such as recreation facilities that have been successful in New York and other urban waterfronts. Finally, Heritage supports the report’s recommendation to continue to pursue all available revenue-generating mechanisms, such as transferable development rights (TDR), potential state historic tax-credit legislation, taxes related to waterfront tourism, bond measures, and a special fund for waterfront rehabilitation projects.

Comstock Saloon becomes newest Legacy inductee!

Comstock Saloon occupies a unique historic space that has been operating as a bar or brewery for over a century. Located along the historic Barbary Coast, the Andromeda Saloon opened in 1907 to cater to suits, sailors, and troublemakers. After changing hands several times, the famed saloon became the Albatross in 1977, then the San Francisco Brewing Company in 1985, until Comstock Saloon took over in 2009. The existing historic features of the bar have been completely restored, including the solid mahogany bar back, the tile trough at the foot of the bar, and the tin ceiling. With a vintage drink and food menu, Comstock Saloon brings back the hearty days of post-earthquake San Francisco.

Stop by for a drink and welcome Comstock Saloon to the Legacy Bars & Restaurants program! For more information on Legacy Bars & Restaurants, visit sfheritage.org/legacy.
Construction cranes dotting the skyline are one clear sign of the rapid changes sweeping the city, especially in the South of Market (SoMa) area. SoMa has long been targeted to absorb the seemingly insatiable demand for new housing and office space in San Francisco. The Draft Central SoMa Plan (“Plan”), released in April 2013, represents the city’s effort to synthesize past and current planning efforts for the area into one document. A separate project proposed in the Central SoMa area, known as the “Fifth and Mission Project” or “5M Project,” starkly contrasts with many of the provisions outlined in the Draft Central SoMa Plan. For one, the 5M Project would eschew the Plan’s template for “mid-rise” development in favor of site-specific zoning to enable new construction up to 470 feet, more than triple the 130-foot height limit recommended by the Plan. As the Planning Department promotes the Central SoMa Plan as a “model for sustainable growth,” will the 5M Project’s towering presence undermine or enhance the Plan’s vision for the future of the neighborhood?

Located across from the proposed 5M Project, the Old U.S. Mint (right) is a National Historic Landmark, dating from 1874, that is underutilized and overdue for rehabilitation.

Contrasting Visions for Growth in Central SoMa

Central SoMa Plan and 5M Project Advance Toward Approval
Central SoMa Plan

Spurred by the then-proposed extension of the Central Subway, the Planning Department began crafting the Central SoMa Plan (formerly the Central Corridor Plan) in 2011 for the area bounded by Market, 2nd, Townsend, and 6th Streets. Currently under construction, the Central Subway extension will continue up Fourth Street through SoMa to Chinatown. The Central Subway extension is seen as an opportunity to plan for “sustainable growth,” as regional population growth projections and environmental concerns have caused local and state governments to mandate that new development be clustered around existing transit hubs. Accordingly, the Draft Central SoMa Plan aims to “support transit-oriented growth,” while maintaining the area’s “vibrant economic and physical diversity.”

The Plan’s recommendations are informed by the South of Market Area Historic Resource Survey, which began in 2007 with a grant from the San Francisco Historic Preservation Fund, as well as the Central SoMa Historic Resources Survey, now nearing completion. The surveys were designed to identify buildings and structures eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources. Although extraordinarily diverse, the dominant physical character of Central SoMa is comprised of low- and mid-rise industrial use and mixed-use buildings, along with associated enclaves of frame dwellings and residential hotels constructed after the 1906 earthquake and fire. The area maintains a highly sensitive historic and cultural heritage context, including dozens of individual historic buildings, several designated and identified historic districts, and two proposed social heritage districts associated with SoMa’s deeply-rooted Filipino and LGBTQ communities.

The draft Central SoMa Historic Context Statement has also identified a notable collection of early 20th-century buildings in the vicinity of the Old U.S. Mint that are representative of the transition between office/retail uses along Market Street and the “back of house” warehouses and light-industrial shops along Mission Street. The Context Statement also stated that the Flower Mart, built in 1956, has historic cultural associations, and is an extremely rare property type. The Flower Mart was designed by master architect Mario Ciampi and is today one of the few remaining flower depots in the country.

The Draft Central SoMa Plan proposes a mid-rise district with an 85-foot height limit in most areas. In some areas the plan would allow buildings to exceed the base height of 85 feet (generally to 130 feet), but these upper stories would be required to meet certain design criteria to ensure the compatibility of new construction to existing surroundings. The plan does not propose to increase height limits in designated and identified historic districts.

The plan also proposes to extend one of the City’s most effective preservation tools, its Transferable Development Rights (TDR) program, to designated historic properties within the Plan Area. If approved, the Central SoMa Plan would usher in the first major expansion of TDR program boundaries in 30 years. An alternative proposal introduced by the TODCO Group, the “Central SOMA Community Plan,” would leverage TDR to protect Production, Distribution, and Retail (PDR) uses. A modified TDR program could also help secure space for legacy businesses and nonprofits.

For less significant older buildings that contribute to the character of the neighborhood, the Plan proposes incentives to encourage their partial retention while meeting growth objectives, including a “density bonus” for preserving existing buildings through additions.

The Planning Department is collecting public comments on the Draft Central SoMa Plan and is preparing to release the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) in early 2015. In conjunction with the environmental review process, Heritage is participating in the Central SoMa Historic Resources Survey Advisory Committee and will be submitting detailed comments on the DEIR.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8
5M Project

Although located squarely within the Central SoMa Plan Area, the 5M Project would chart its own path unconstrained by the Plan’s development standards for the surrounding neighborhood. The property owner, Hearst Corporation, engaged Forest City in 2008 to help imagine what to do next with the four-acre site between Mission and Howard Streets. The current proposal calls for rehabilitation of the Chronicle Building (901-933 Mission Street) and the Dempster Printing Building (447-449 Minna Street), demolition of six buildings (including the historic Camelline Building, 430 Natoma Street), and construction of four new buildings and a multi-story connector over Natoma Street that, together, would exceed one million square feet. New towers would range in height from 50 feet to 470 feet (or more than two-and-a-half times the existing 160-foot height limit). A single-purpose Special Use District, delimited by the project boundaries, would require separate approval by the Board of Supervisors to enable maximum build-out to the desired height and density.

Surrounding the 5M Project are many notable individual Landmarks, three identified historic districts, and the proposed “SoMa Pilipinas” social heritage district. In addition to three eligible historic resources within the Project Site, the Old U.S. Mint (88 Fifth Street) is located just across Mission Street. Completed in 1874, the Old Mint is a National Historic Landmark and among very few extant SoMa buildings to survive the 1906 Earthquake and Fire. Although the Old Mint’s future use and occupancy is currently uncertain, it is clear that any reuse scenario will require significant capital investment.

To help refine the project, Forest City has proactively solicited public input to develop “project principles promoting openness and activity at the site.” Despite model public outreach, and a community-benefits package, the South of Market Community Action Network and the Yerba Buena Neighborhood Consortium, among others, have decried potential adverse impacts of the 5M Project, ranging from displacement of residents, local businesses, and nonprofit organizations to the loss of historic resources.

In a November 2014 letter to the Planning Department, the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) highlighted deficiencies in the Draft EIR’s analysis of preservation alternatives, the “unsatisfying” rationale for demolition of the Camelline Building, and “the project’s scale and its overall combined effect on historic resources in the area.” Heritage’s comments on the Draft EIR, submitted in January 2015, echo and amplify these concerns. Like the HPC, Heritage’s comments focus on the need to reduce the size and scale of the project, mitigate impacts on adjacent historic resources (especially the Old U.S. Mint), and explore new preservation alternatives that incorporate the Camelline Building and relate to it architecturally.

The Central SoMa Plan and the 5M Project represent strikingly divergent approaches to future growth in San Francisco. As both work their way through the approval process, city planners and decision makers will be challenged by how to reconcile competing visions for SoMa and ensure the integrity of neighborhood planning efforts going forward. To read Heritage’s comments on the Draft EIR for the 5M Project, visit www.sfheritage.org.
Soirée 2015 at the Mark Hopkins Hotel
A Fundraising Gala for San Francisco Heritage

Each year, San Francisco Heritage celebrates the city’s unique architectural character with our gala. We are pleased to announce that Soirée 2015 returns to the Mark Hopkins Hotel, San Francisco City Landmark No. 184, on Saturday, April 18th. Inspired by the elegance of San Francisco in the 1920s, the black-tie gala will feature cocktails, fine dining, dancing, casino gaming, and a four-star silent auction.

Since opening atop Nob Hill in 1926, the Mark Hopkins Hotel has remained at the center of San Francisco’s social scene. Commissioned by mining engineer George D. Smith and designed by the architecture firm Weeks and Day, the 19-story building reflects both French Chateau and Spanish Renaissance architectural influences and is embellished with elaborate terra-cotta ornamentation.

On the interior, the Room of the Dons contains nine seven-foot-high panels painted by artists Maynard Dixon and Frank van Sloun in 1926 for the hotel’s opening. One panel shows Queen Califia, “siren of audacious conquistadores,” set against a gold leaf sky. The hotel’s grand ballroom, the Peacock Court, is an historic backdrop that has hosted twelve presidents, royals, famous big-band performers, and countless celebrities. The Top of the Mark, a certified “Legacy” establishment, offers unmatched panoramic views of the city, the Bay, Alcatraz, and the Golden Gate and Bay Bridges.

Please join Heritage for a sensational Soirée at the incomparable Mark Hopkins Hotel. Revel beneath Califia and her Amazons in the Room of the Dons, sip cocktails inspired by the Top of the Mark, and peruse the silent auction before retiring to the Peacock Court for a gourmet three-course dinner. Festivities continue after dinner with dancing to the music of Pamela Rose and Sidepocket in the Room of the Dons, and our traditional casino in the Lobby Terrace.

For information about underwriting, to make reservations, or to receive an invitation, contact Director of Membership and Development Carolyn Squeri at csqueri@sfheritage.org or 415-441-3000 x14.

Mrs. Bland Platt and Mr. David P. Wessel are honorary co-chairs for Soirée 2015. Special thanks to our Media Sponsor: Nob Hill Gazette.
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“Janet Delaney: South of Market” Photography Exhibition
de Young Museum
Golden Gate Park

April 2015

SATURDAY, APRIL 11
Latino Historic Context Statement
Location TBD

SATURDAY, APRIL 18, 6PM
Soirée 2015
InterContinental Mark Hopkins Hotel
999 California Street

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22, 6PM
Lecture: “Inventiveness and Innovation: Contemporary architects discuss the Influence and Impacts of Architecture and Architects of the 1915 World’s Fair”
California Historical Society
678 Mission Street, near Third

Saturday, April 18, 6PM
Soirée 2015
InterContinental Mark Hopkins Hotel
999 California Street, at Taylor

for more information about upcoming heritage events, please visit sfheritage.org or call 415.441.3000