South San Francisco Downtown Station Area Plan
Community Benefits Platform

South San Francisco’s Downtown Station Area planning (Downtown SAP) process offers residents, businesses, workers and local policymakers a tremendous opportunity to envision the City’s downtown and area around the SSF Caltrain station as a transit oriented district that will provide a full range of community benefits to the people who live, work and do business here. As a Priority Development Area (PDA), the site is identified by the Sustainable Communities Strategy for infill development and is eligible for government grants and other targeted funding. The SSF Downtown SAP Community Benefits Platform that follows is a set of principles that will ensure that we achieve the potential of this planning process.

Greener and Healthier Development Alternatives

In the Downtown SAP, the City can commit to alternatives that decrease greenhouse gas emissions and include features that create healthier and more sustainable communities. Policies to achieve a greener plan include sustainable building practices, compact development that will generate less auto traffic, green infrastructure—permeable pavement, bicycle and pedestrian lanes, and low-impact development practices as well as the amenities that create complete communities.

Creating community parks, inviting open spaces, recreational facilities and wide pedestrian walk-ways will make it safer and more enjoyable for people of all ages to walk to and within the downtown, reducing traffic congestion and benefiting from an active lifestyle with their families and neighbors. These land use and transportation changes will have long-term community health impacts as pollution is reduced and behavioral changes serve as primary illness prevention and community wellness measures.

We also believe that this planning process will offer an opportunity to proactively address hazards such as earthquakes and sea-level-rise for the long-term benefit of the community.
Affordable Homes and Homelessness Solutions

The City has made a commitment to plan for more housing in the PDA. The Downtown SAP should commit to inclusion as opportunities, such as developer agreements, become available. The City’s Housing Element identifies nine sites in the SSF downtown area as housing opportunity sites that can be developed for lower-income multifamily residential properties. We expect the City to actively implement the affordable housing policies committed to in the City’s Housing Element within the PDA. The Downtown SAP should honor these commitments and provide housing that is affordable to people who work in SSF at the bio-tech companies, at UPS, in the hospitality and airport related industries surrounding the SFO hub and the new and existing retail jobs downtown. An appropriate mix of ownership and rental opportunities and types of housing both in the neighborhoods immediately bordering Grand Avenue and the neighborhood adjacent to the Caltrain station will accommodate families and single people enhancing our diverse and vibrant community.

In the absence of redevelopment funding, the Downtown SAP must provide incentives for non-profit housing developers and maximize low-income housing funding opportunities including low-income housing tax credits and regional grants for housing in PDAs. The Downtown SAP should include policies to address the jobs/housing imbalance such as impact fees or commercial linkage fees, the creation of a Community Benefit District or set-asides for non-profit housing developers. The City should consider selling vacant properties to housing developers at prices that will make affordable housing viable.

As new market rate housing units are created, existing low-income residents—especially renters, single room occupancy residents and the newly housed populations must be protected so that gentrification does not price them out of their homes. Renter protection policies, such as just cause eviction and rent stabilization are critical in ensuring that all downtown residents can benefit from the growth and development.

Following a “housing first” approach to the problem of homelessness in our community, we can build on the San Mateo County’s HOPE plan and include in our plans permanent housing with access to services for adults, youth, seniors, veterans and families that are homeless and those that are at risk of homelessness.

Efficient Affordable Public Transit with Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Options.

The Downtown SAP should reflect collaboration with transit operators serving South San Francisco and large employers to improve and encourage transit access and connectivity to the places where people live, work, and play in South San Francisco and around the Bay Area.

The Caltrain Station should serve as a point of connectivity, bridging the downtown and employment center to the East of 101 with safe and attractive walkways and bicycle lanes. The area around the station should be well lit, offer long-term secure bicycle parking, improved visibility, and accessibility. Special attention should be paid to linking the Caltrain Station to the planned and existing bicycle and pedestrian networks in the corporate park east of 101. Many of the large companies have existing master plans that include bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Filling the gap between these networks and the Caltrain Station is key to diversifying the commute mode share, and improving access to and patronage of existing and future downtown businesses by people who work in the area.

Downtown should offer a well-marked bicycle lane to the BART station and a network of bicycle lanes throughout the Downtown SAP. The short distance between the BART station and the downtown should be advertised through signage indicating the distance and direction between the two destinations. The Downtown SAP should offer adequate and distributed bike parking throughout the plan area.

1 HOPE (Housing Our People Effectively) is a ten-year action plan that brings together the business, nonprofit, and public sector communities to address the challenging issue of homelessness at its core, rather than manage it at the margins. http://www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/portal/site/humanservices/menuitem.2c94f6db3.30bc6d29e5d/732a0/vgnextoid=bb8c0ac6620120vgnVCM10000d937230a1C90D
Given that the airport and many of the biotech businesses in SSF operate twenty-four hours, public transportation options must be efficient and accessible throughout the day and night. Public transportation options need to be affordable to ensure that they are usable by workers. SamTrans Bus connectors or public shuttles between BART, Caltrain, the Water Transit Authority (ferry), downtown and businesses east of 101 will be a crucial part of this plan.

We need walkable streets and wide sidewalks that can accommodate benches, bus shelters, trees, and outside seating for restaurants and cafes. Future development should preserve and build on the compact style of Grand Avenue, which makes for an attractive street to walk and browse shop windows. Marked mid-block crossings and bulb-outs at intersections should be used to make for a safe and convenient pedestrian priority district. Street signage should also be utilized to denote popular destinations (i.e. Caltrain, parking lots and garages, City Hall, BART) and distances to encourage walking and bicycling.

The Downtown should adopt a parking management strategy that utilizes unbundling2, pricing and signage to ensure incentivize residents and visitors to use alternative modes of transportation but also make it easier to find a convenient spot for those who do choose to drive. This strategy should be paired with creating a Parking Management District, where increased revenues from parking are dedicated for streetscape improvements and other features of a Community Benefits District that make the downtown area more attractive for business and residents.

Finally, for those residents and shoppers that may need to drive, we encourage the city to include several car sharing parking spots in opportunity sites like major shopping centers, Caltrain, and the BART station.

The multi-year build out of the development enabled by our new Downtown SAP should provide hundreds of good middle class construction jobs that pay Area Standard Wages. Our community’s youth will also gain career pathways into the construction industry when apprentices who are enrolled in State of California approved Apprenticeship Programs are required to be part of the construction team. The use of a local workforce and local business sourcing should be encouraged so that the hundreds of millions in wages and materials used in the construction of these developments are reinvested into the local economy.

With opportunities for new businesses to come into our community, we must take steps to retain existing businesses, and ensure that big box stores do not displace small businesses that are the lifeblood of our local community.

As we create multi-use transit oriented development projects, we must ensure that the retail, maintenance and hospitality service jobs in large enterprises will come with an expectation that the workers will have a voice at work and the right to express their desire for a union by a cross-check election with employer neutrality in the process. These labor standards should be referenced in the Downtown SAP and adopted as City policy so that local workers will benefit from the plan and developers can expect support for these policies.

As we seek to enhance the climate for our existing bio-tech companies and create an attractive home for new companies in this sector, we must encourage companies, workers, unions and the public workforce development partners to create and participate in job training programs that will create inter-firm and cross-firm career ladders for existing employees and new entry-level positions for local residents. Collaboration and coordination between SSF’s economic development strategies and the workforce development strategies undertaken by the County and Bay Area workforce development boards and training partners will enhance the economic viability of the Downtown SAP for businesses and local workers.

Building Businesses and Creating Good Jobs in Our Community

A strong economy in our neighborhood depends on the retention of a full range of businesses in the area and the creation of new businesses that will provide good jobs with wages, benefits and career opportunities for people at entry-level and highly skilled positions.

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2 A parking strategy in which parking spaces are rented or sold separately rather than automatically included with the rent or purchase price of a residential or commercial unit.
Strong Community-Driven and Inclusive Process

The new SSF Downtown SAP must reflect the diverse needs of the South San Francisco community including the interests of the low-income residents and workers who stand to benefit the most from the improvements articulated by the Downtown SAP.

The planning process must include opportunities for two-way communication with residents being informed about the options being considered and planners hearing from residents, local businesses, transportation, economic development and workforce development agencies and other stakeholders about their vision for this area.

We hope that the plan will contain community benefits for all segments of the community. To achieve this end, the process should engage the listed stakeholders and seek out partners including environmentalists, labor unions and their members, affordable housing advocates, public transportation advocates, community-based organizations representing low-income people and immigrants, renters, people of faith, people with disabilities, small businesses, and seniors.

The planning process should reflect the racial, ethnic and linguistic diversity of the community and special efforts should be made to encourage participation by those who are not familiar with planning processes.

This Community Benefits Platform is the work of South San Francisco community leaders and their representatives, with funding from the Great Communities Collaborative and The San Francisco Foundation.

Friends of Caltrain
Greenbelt Alliance
Housing Leadership Council
San Mateo County Building Trades Council
San Mateo County Union Community Alliance
Sheetmetal Workers Union Local 104
Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter
Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition
Transform
UFCW Local 5

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