



# SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

**MEMO**

**DATE:** January 29, 2014

**TO:** Architectural Review Committee of the Historic Preservation Commission

**FROM:** Lily Yegazu, Historic Preservation Technical Specialist – (415) 575-9076

**REVIEWED BY:** Tim Frye, Preservation Coordinator, (415) 575-6822

**RE:** **Review and Comment at February 5, 2014 Hearing**  
**650 Howard Street**  
**Case No. 2013.0917H**

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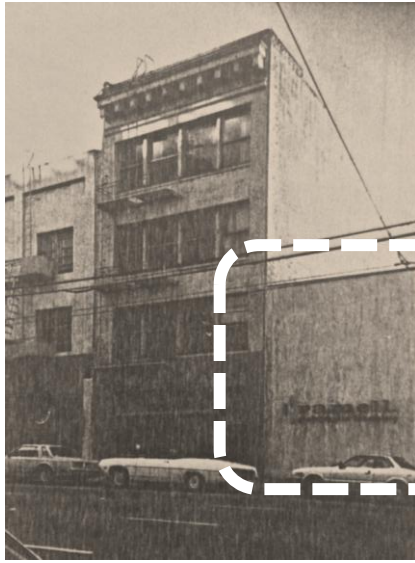
## BACKGROUND

The Planning Department (Department) has requested review and comment before the Architectural Review Committee (ARC) regarding the proposed exterior alteration of existing Category V (Unrated) building within the New Montgomery-Mission-Second Conservation District, which is listed in Appendix F of Article 11 of the San Francisco Planning Code.

## PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

The subject building is located at 650 Howard Street in Accessor's Block 3722, Lot 024 on the north side of Howard Street between 3<sup>rd</sup> and New Montgomery Streets. It is a Category V (Unrated) Building that is located within the New Montgomery-Mission-Second Street Conservation District, the C-3-O (SD)(Downtown Office (Special Development)) Zoning District, and a 150-S Height and Bulk District.

Constructed in 1923, the structure at 650 Howard Street is a single-story, reinforced-concrete commercial structure with a flat roof that is designed in a utilitarian mode by architect A. H. Knoll. The square-plan building has been substantially altered and is currently clad with white marble panels, mosaic tiles and painted plywood. The primary façade facing Howard Street is three bays wide with two pairs of metal doors located in the outer bays. The center bay is a former entrance infilled with mosaic tile. A wood canopy spans along the length of the primary façade and terminates with a dome shaped awning at the main entrance. Business identification signs consisting of individual channel letters in gold wall mounted above the awning and a blade sign.



Historic photos (partial) of subject building circa 1982



Historic photos (partial) of subject building circa 1990

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project includes exterior alterations of the previously heavily altered Howard Street façade. The scope of work includes the following:

- Remove existing two pairs of double doors and install one pair of double doors with side lights within the outer bays. The new doors will be 7' W x 7' H with solid wood core and stainless steel metal satin finish.
- Remove existing cladding and replace with new cladding materials consisting of concrete dimensional tiles in sandstone and porcelain tile.
- Remove the existing canopy and replace with new fabricated aluminum awning with brushed finish and led down lighting integrated within the awning.
- A second fabricated aluminum awning with integrated led lighting will also be installed at the top of the building.
- The existing wall sign will be shifted to be centrally located on the façade and the existing blade sign is proposed to remain at the same location.

## ARTICLE 11 – Appendix F – New Montgomery-Mission-Second Conservation District

In reviewing an application for a Permit to Alter, the Historic Preservation Commission must consider whether the proposed work would be compatible with the character of the Conservation District as described in Appendix F of Article 11 of the Planning Code and the character defining features specifically outlined in the designating ordinance. In pertinent part, Appendix F states:

**Massing and Composition.** Almost without exception, the buildings in the New Montgomery-Mission-Second Conservation District are built to the front property line

and occupy the entire site. Most buildings are either square or rectangular in plan, some with interior light courts to allow sunlight and air into the interiors of buildings. Nearly all cover their entire parcels, and their primary facades face the street. Building massings along New Montgomery and Second Streets have different directional orientations. For the most part, the large buildings on New Montgomery Street are horizontally oriented, since they are built on relatively large lots, often occupying an entire blockface. Their horizontal width often exceeds their height. The buildings on Second Street are built on much smaller lots, and hence have a vertical orientation. An exception on New Montgomery is the tower of the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Building, whose soaring verticality is unique for that street.

To express the mass and weight of the structure, masonry materials are used on multi-dimensional wall surfaces with texture and depth, which simulates the qualities necessary to support the weight of a load-bearing wall.

Despite their differing orientation, almost all buildings share a two or three-part compositional arrangement. In addition, buildings are often divided into bays which establish a steady rhythm along the streets of the District. The rhythm is the result of fenestration, structural articulation or other detailing which breaks the facade into discrete segments. A common compositional device in the District is the emphasis placed upon either the end bays or the central bay.

**Materials and Color.** Various forms of masonry are the predominant building materials in the district. A number of buildings on the northern end of New Montgomery use brown or buff brick. Terra cotta is also used as a facing material, and is frequently glazed to resemble granite or other stones. On Second and Mission Streets, several buildings are faced in stucco. To express the mass and weight of the structure, masonry materials are often rusticated at the ground and second story to increase the textural variation and sense of depth. Several buildings along Howard Street are noteworthy because they are clad in brick in warm earth tones, exhibit fine masonry craftsmanship, and remain unpainted.

The materials are generally colored light or medium earth tones, including white, cream, buff, yellow, and brown. Individual buildings generally use a few different tones of one color.

**Detailing and Ornamentations.** Buildings range from industrial brick and stucco office/warehouses to ornately decorated office buildings. The details on the latter buildings are generally of Classical/Renaissance derivation and include projecting cornices and belt courses, rustication, columns and colonnades, and arches. Industrial commercial buildings are noted by their utilitarian nature, with limited areas or ornament applied at the cornice entablature and around windows.

## **STAFF ANALYSIS**

There Department seeks the advice of the ARC regarding compatibility of the proposed materials with the New Montgomery-Mission-Second Street Conservation District. The Department would like the ARC to consider the following information:

### **Massing and Composition**

The existing structure is devoid of structural or detailing articulation except for the lower portion of the façade that is divided into three bays. The current proposal will introduce new materials such as 12" x 12" dimensional concrete tiles to provide some articulation and give depth to the facade, however because the same material is proposed to be used on the entire façade, with the exception of the piers, staff does not believe this approach achieves the intended façade articulation outlined in Appendix F. Staff recommends that the dimensional tiles should be limited on the façade and be used as decorative elements or motif element in conjunction with other compatible materials to articulate the façade.

The façade should be further structurally articulated by providing fenestration on the upper level of the building and on the center bay of the lower portion. The pattern and composition of the new fenestration and openings should align with the already established pattern and composition by the three bays on the lower portion of the building. Staff acknowledges that the nature of the business may not be ideal to have transparency into the interior of the tenant space and as such recommends the use of curtains or other similar materials on the inside of the openings or utilize translucent glazing to provide screening and achieve the desired privacy. It should be noted that Section 145.1(c)(6) of the Planning Code requires that "frontages with active uses that are not residential or PDR must be fenestrated with transparent windows and doorways for no less than 60 percent of the street frontage at the ground level and allow visibility to the inside of the building. Copy of the Department's Standards for Storefront Transparency is attached.

In addition to providing new openings and fenestration, the façade treatment should be further articulated in detail by using different materials. Specifically, the façade treatment provides an opportunity to introduce a two or three-part composition and further break the façade into discrete segments. Specifically, this may be achieved by using different materials on the lower and upper portion of the building as well as extending the center piers the full height of the building.

### **Recommendation:**

1. The Department recommends the use of different materials on the upper and lower portion of the building to articulate the façade and introduce a two-part composition. In addition, to provide structural articulation new fenestration be introduced on the upper level and on the center bay of the building façade.

### **Material and Color**

The Sponsor proposes to remove the existing materials and clad the entire façade with cream colored concrete dimensional tiles. The existing two piers dividing the façade into three bays and the two piers at each end of the building will be clad with dark honed porcelain tiles. The Sponsor has also provided two alternate cladding materials per Preservation staff's request. The first material is a concrete dimensional tile similar to the one originally proposed but in a darker shade of color (taupe) and different pattern. The second alternative is to clad the façade using light grey marble with dark grey grain lines.

The use of buff or cream color cladding material is consistent with the color of other cladding materials prevalent within the District. The use of different tones of one color or compatible materials is also appropriate as evidenced on individual buildings within the District. Structures in the district display masonry materials that are often rusticated at the ground and second story to express the mass and weight of structures, and to increase the textural variation and sense of depth. This is interpreted on the proposed alteration using dimensional square tiles to create a scored façade, and provide a sense of depth on the building. However, as mentioned above, staff has a concern regarding the use of the dimensional concrete tile cladding material on the entire facade as the pattern created by the dimensional tiles may give the facade a busy appearance without providing meaningful articulation to the facade.

The use of darker finish material on the piers appears to be appropriate as it helps to break the façade into discrete segments provided the two shorter piers are extended to the full height of the building as recommended. However, staff recommends the use of durable masonry or stone material that is consistent with the existing buildings within the Conservation District instead of the porcelain material proposed.

The new double doors proposed are comprised of solid wood core and stainless steel metal with satin finish. To ensure consistency with the Department's Storefront Guidelines (draft), the new doors should be framed double doors with transparent or translucent glazing. Any window or door on the façade with metal frames should also have powder-coated finish.

### **Recommendation:**

2. The Department recommends that the use of the dimensional concrete tiles be limited on the façade as decorative element or motif to articulate the façade. In addition, the porcelain material used to clad the piers on the building be replaced with a durable stone or masonry material.

### **Detailing and Ornamentation**

As previously discussed, using the dimensional concrete tiles uniformly on the body of the façade is not supported by staff. Instead, this material should be used in a limited way to add interesting detailing and rustication to the façade in conjunction with other durable material on

the different portion of the building.

Two fabricated aluminum awnings are proposed to be installed on the façade, each spanning the width of the building. In addition to not being consistent with the Department's Awning Gridlines as fully detailed on the Awning and Signs section of this report, the aluminum awnings appear as plant-on elements that are not fully integrated into the design of the façade. It is recommended that the awnings be replaced with horizontal architectural elements of durable materials that are integrated with the new façade to further articulate the façade by creating a two-part composition and provide a more defined architectural cap.

**Recommendation:**

3. The Department recommends that a new horizontal element that is integrated with the new façade design be introduced at the location of the lower awning to create a two-part composition. The Department also recommends that the smaller aluminum awning on at the cornice line be replaced with a more defined architectural cap that is integrated with the overall design of the building. Both horizontal elements should be comprised of durable and compatible materials.

**Awnings and Signs**

The proposal replaces the existing canopy that spans the length of the primary façade and terminates with a dome shaped awning. The new awning will be of aluminum material and will span the length of the façade. Although the new awning is appropriately located at a pedestrian level consistent with the Department's Awning Guidelines, it is not consistent with the guidelines in terms of material, length and illumination. Specifically, the guidelines call for awnings to be retractable and operable and not appear to be rigid, hard, or inflexible; be constructed of a non-vinyl cloth or canvas with a matte finish or a material similar in appearance and texture; have valances that are unframed and flexible (12" maximum). In addition, awnings should not exceed the width of the storefront opening or associated commercial window opening and should not be illuminated from below or internally. The Department believes the proposed awning should be replaced with an awning that better relate to the openings on the façade.

The existing wall sign comprised of individual channel letters in gold color are proposed to be shifted to be centrally located on the building façade and no changes are proposed to the existing blade sign at this time. Future changes to signs or new sign proposals will require review and approval of a Minor Permit to Alter.

**Recommendation:**

4. The Department recommends that the proposed aluminum sloped awning be replaced with an awning that does not appear rigid and not span the length of the façade. Instead a fabric awning that better relates with the openings on the façade be proposed.

## **REQUESTED ACTION**

Specifically, the Department seeks comments on:

- The compatibility of the proposed project with the Secretary of the Interior Standards;
- The project concerns raised by staff; and,
- The project recommendations proposed by staff.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

- Map of Subject Property within New Montgomery-Mission-Second Street Conservation District
- Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) Form, 1994
- Department's Standards for Storefront Transparency
- Project Sponsor plans, elevations, and photographs, January 2014.

# New Montgomery-Mission-Second Street Conservation District

SUBJECT PROPERTY



ARC Hearing  
Case Number 2013.0917H  
650 Howard Street



State of California — The Resources Agency  
 DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION  
**PRIMARY RECORD**

Primary # \_\_\_\_\_  
 HRI # \_\_\_\_\_  
 Trinomial \_\_\_\_\_  
 NRHP Status Code \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_  
 Listings \_\_\_\_\_ Review Code \_\_\_\_\_ Reviewer \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Page 1 of 1 \*Resource name(s) or number (assigned by recorder) 648 Howard Street

P1. Other Identifier: Gold Club

\*P2. Location:  Not for Publication  Unrestricted

\*a. County: San Francisco and (P2b and P2c or P2d. Attach a Location Map as necessary.

\*b. USGS 7.5' Quad: San Francisco North Date: 1994

\*c. Address: 648 HOWARD ST City: San Francisco Zip: 94105

\*d. UTM: Zone: 10 mE/ mN (G.P.S.)

e. Other Locational Data: Assessor's Parcel Number (Map, Block, Lot): Parcel #: 3722024

\*P3a. Description: (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries.)

648 Mission Street occupies a 55' x 80' lot on the north side of Howard Street, between New Montgomery and 3rd streets. Built in 1923, the heavily remodeled, one-story, reinforced-concrete commercial building is designed in a utilitarian mode. The square-plan building, finished in marble panels, mosaic tile, and painted plywood, is capped by a flat roof. The primary facade, which faces Howard Street to the south, is three bays wide. At street level the facade consists of two pairs of metal doors in the outer bays and the center bay is a former entrance infilled with mosaic tile. A wood canopy extends along the facade, which terminates with a frieze containing and elaborate sign of applied script letters. The building appears to be in good condition.

\*P3b. Resource Attributes: (list attributes and codes) HP6. 1-3 Story Commercial Building

P4. Resources Present:  Building  Structure  Object  Site  District  Element of District  Other



P5b. Photo: (view and date)  
 View toward north, 9.27.07,  
 100\_4605.JPG

\*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Sources:  
 Historic  Prehistoric  Both  
 1923, Assessor's Office

\*P7. Owner and Address:  
 Howard Montgomery LLC  
 250 Columbus Ave. #207  
 San Francisco, CA 94133

\*P8. Recorded by  
 Christopher VerPlanck  
 Kelley & VerPlanck  
 2912 Diamond Street #330  
 San Francisco, CA 94131

\*P9. Date Recorded:  
 11.02.07

\*P10. Survey Type:  
 Intensive: Transit Center District EIR

\*P11. Report Citation: (Cite survey report and other sources, or enter "none") None

\*Attachments:  None  Location Map  Sketch Map  Continuation Sheet  Building, Structure, and Object Record  
 Archaeological Record  District Record  Linear Feature Record  Milling Station Record  Rock Art Record  
 Artifact Record  Photograph Record  Other (list)

**BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD**

\*Resource Name or #: 648 Howard Street

B1. Historic Name:

B2. Common Name:

B3. Original Use: Commercial

B4. Present Use: Night club

\*B5. Architectural Style: Commercial

\*B6. Construction History: Constructed in 1922. New cladding, entrances reconfigured 1984.

\*B7. Moved?  No  Yes  Unknown Date:

Original Location:

\*B8. Related Features: None

B9a. Architect: Andrew H. Knoll

b. Builder: unknown

\*B10. Significance: Theme: None

Area: South of Market district, San Francisco, CA

Period of Significance: N/A

Property Type: Commercial

Applicable Criteria: N/A

**Summary of Findings**

The building at 642-650 Howard Street does not appear to be individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) or the California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR). An undistinguished former wholesale warehouse, the building has undergone too many alterations for it to convey whatever historical significance it once had.

See Continuation Sheet

B11. Additional Resource Attributes:

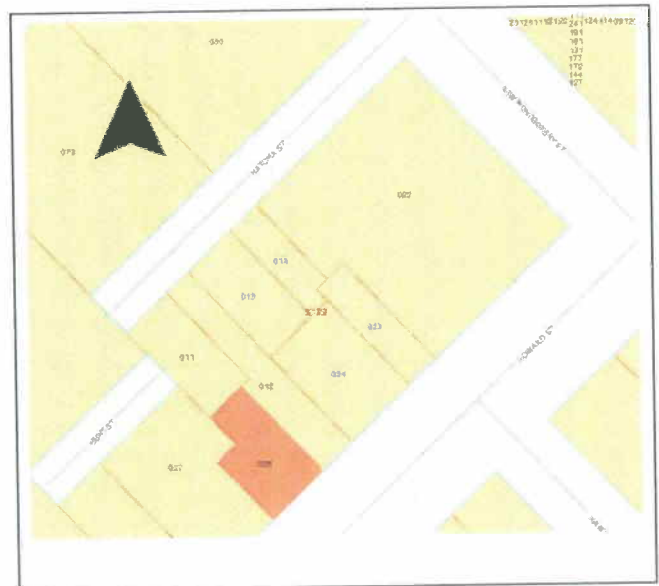
\*B12. References:

See continuation sheet

B13. Remarks:

\*B14. Evaluator: Carey & Co., Inc.

\*Date of Evaluation: March 16, 2010



\*Recorded by: Carey & Co., Inc.

\*Date: March 16, 2010

Continuation     Update

**Continuation of B10. Significance:**

**Historic Context**

Early in the morning of April 18, 1906, a strong earthquake jolted San Franciscans out of their slumber. Catastrophic fires, assisted by a failed water system, rampaged through city over the next few days. When the smoke cleared, 497 blocks of San Francisco, including the South of Market district, was a decimated wasteland that had to be rebuilt from scratch. A flurry of construction followed. Within two years, the City of San Francisco issued over 14,000 building permits, 10,000 of which pertained to new buildings. In the SOMA district, modest warehouses and light industrial buildings replaced the densely packed working-class residences that previously dominated the area. As one *San Francisco Chronicle* writer wrote, "Mission street [sic] is being rapidly appropriated by the firms who were conspicuous in the old days. Howard street [sic] is beginning to receive attention from the dealers, and that portion of it included in the blocks between First and Third streets [sic] is destined to become, from its nearness to the banking section and the restored retail district of the city, a popular and convenient avenue for wholesale dealers who are crowded beyond Missions street [sic] (*Chronicle*, June 26, 1907).

According to Kelley & VerPlanck's 2008 context statement for the Transbay Survey area, redevelopment of SOMA was uneven. The initial flurry of construction slowed down in 1913, then picked up again around the First World War. Following the recession of 1919, construction picked up again and remained generally steady throughout the 1920s. The Great Depression of the 1930s, followed by World War II virtually stopped construction in SOMA. These later periods of construction were marked by larger, more architecturally significant buildings. Concrete construction for warehouses gained favor over brick because of concrete's durability, its ability to withstand earthquakes and fires, and its ability to provide for large open spaces. Constructed in 1922, the concrete building at 642-650 Howard Street fit this pattern of later building types. The Happy Homes Furniture Co. first occupied the building, but the Coast Radio Supply Co., a wholesale distributor, soon moved in. Subsequent occupants remain unknown.

Andrew H. Knoll was the architect for 642-650 Howard Street. Born in Germany in 1882, he immigrated to the United States in 1901 and became a naturalized citizen in 1912. It was around this time that Knoll partnered with Walter Falch. Falch & Knoll specialized in large, often luxurious, modern apartment buildings. They also designed some single-family homes west of Twin Peaks and a parking garage (demolished) on Post Street. The firm's most prominent public building was the Emanuel church of the Evangelical Association (1915), located at 19<sup>th</sup> and Capp Streets in the Mission District (extant). In 1919 Falch & Knoll dissolved their partnership.

Early in his independent practice, Knoll appears to have specialized in more working-class oriented commissions. The first known independent commission he completed was a group of 90 one-story, six-room cottages in East Oakland. Three light industrial projects followed, including an auto accessories building at Catham Place and Bush Street (demolished), alterations to a three-story brick loft building at Folsom and Essex Streets (demolished), and a three-story loft building on Market Street between 2<sup>nd</sup> and New Montgomery (demolished). The Eisenbach Company, a real estate development firm, commissioned Knoll for the last of these three projects as well as for 642-650 Howard Street.

**Evaluation**

The building at 642-650 Howard Street does not appear to be individually eligible for the CRHR or NRHP. While it was constructed during a general building boom of the 1920s, it is an ordinary building that alone does not capture the significance of this historical trend and, therefore, does not appear to be significant under Criteria A/1. No known persons of significance are associated with the building; thus it does not appear to be eligible for the CRHR or NRHP under Criterion B/1. The building is not likely to yield information significant to history or prehistory and, therefore, does not appear eligible under Criterion D/4.

Lastly, 642-650 Howard Street does not appear to be eligible under Criterion C/3. Although A. H. Knoll, a locally known architect, designed several apartment buildings in San Francisco during his partnership with Walter Falch, more research would have to be conducted to confirm that he should be considered a master architect in his own right. Despite the fact that the single-story massing and plain box form of the building links it to the small-scale industrial lofts and warehouses that dominated the SOMA district for most of the twentieth century, it does not appear to be a significant example of this style or building typology.

648 Howard Street retains poor integrity. It has not been moved and stands amidst similarly scaled one-to-three story buildings, so it retains its integrity of location, setting, and association. However, the façade has been altered beyond recognition, with new cladding and altered entrances. These changes adversely impact the building's integrity of design, material, workmanship, and feeling so that it no longer expresses its historical character.

\*Recorded by: Carey & Co., Inc.

\*Date: March 16, 2010

Continuation     Update

**Continuation of B10. Significance:**

*Previous Evaluations*

According to San Francisco Planning Department records, the building at 642-650 Howard Street has not been assigned a California Historical Resource Status Code. It has not received a rating in the City's Downtown Master Plan and was not surveyed as part of the 1976 Citywide Survey or the 1977-1978 San Francisco Architectural Heritage Survey. In the 2008 Transit Center District Survey, Kelley & VerPlanck assigned the building California Historical Resource Status Code 6Z, indicating it appears to be ineligible for listing in the CRHR through a survey evaluation.

**Continuation of B12. References:**

Advertisement. *Oakland Tribune*. November 14, 1925, p. 6-B.

Advertisement. *Oakland Tribune*. July 14, 1924, p. 4.

"Apartment Building has Latest Features." *San Francisco Chronicle*. July 29, 1916, p. 9.

"Architect Draws Plans for Three Apartments." *San Francisco Chronicle*. June 28, 1919, p. 19.

Architect Knoll Busy." *Architect Engineer*, Vol. LX (January 1920): 114.

"Art in New Home and Park Treatment Makes Potent Appeal." *San Francisco Chronicle*. July 13, 1918, p. 9.

Bloomfield, Anne. "A History of the California Historical Society's New Mission Street Neighborhood."  
*California History*, Vol. 74, no. 4 (Winter 1995/1996): 373-393.

Bloomfield, Anne. "Second and Howard Streets District: National Historic District Nomination." October 3, 1998.

Building Permits for 642-650 Howard Street. City and County of San Francisco Department of Building and Inspection.

"City Real Estate Deals Closed During Week Rank among Most Important Transactions in Investment Holdings of the Year."  
"Heavy Investment in Apartments." *San Francisco Chronicle*. July 8, 1916, p. 9.

"City Realty Market is Stirred by Important Transactions." *San Francisco Chronicle*. May 17, 1913, p. 11.

"Emanuel Church of Evangelical Association." *Architect & Engineer*, Vol. XLIII (October 1915): 87-89.

"Grading Site for Erection of Apartments." *San Francisco Chronicle*. May 5, 1917, p. 12.

"Growth of City Population Proved by the Demand for Dwellings." *San Francisco Chronicle*. June 1, 1912, p. 10.

"Heavy Investment in Apartments." *San Francisco Chronicle*. January 31, 1914, p. 4.

Kelley & VerPlanck. "Transit Center District Survey." Prepared for the San Francisco Planning Department. July 22, 2008.

"Large Acreage for Home Park." *San Francisco Chronicle*. July 24, 1913, p. 8.

"Many Sales and Trades Made in Investment Realty Holdings." *San Francisco Chronicle*. February 17, 1917, p. 9.

"New Parish School Will be Dedicated." *San Francisco Chronicle*. July 29, 1916, p. 9.

"Outside Capital Seeks Investment in City Realty." *San Francisco Chronicle*. January 18, 1913, p. 8.

"Real Estate Men Expect Revival of Business." *San Francisco Chronicle*. June 20, 1914, p. 4.

\*Recorded by: Carey & Co., Inc.

\*Date: March 16, 2010

Continuation     Update

**Continuation of B12. References:**

"Realty Agents Anticipate Revival of Activities." *San Francisco Chronicle*. November 16, 1912, p. 10.

San Francisco City Directories.

San Francisco Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board. A Context Statement and Architectural/Historical Survey of Unreinforced Masonry Building (UMB) Construction in San Francisco from 1850 to 1940. San Francisco, Calif.: Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board, San Francisco Department of City Planning, November 1990.

"To Alter Building." *San Francisco Chronicle*. October 16, 1920, p. 6.

"To Build Ninety Cottages." *Architect & Engineer*, Vol. LIX. November 1919, p. 120.

United States Federal Census, 1860-1930, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com), accessed January 14, 2010.

"With the Architects." *Architect & Engineer*, Vol. XLII. August 1915, p. 108.

"With the Architects." *Architect & Engineer*, Vol. LIV (August 1918): 109.



SAN FRANCISCO  
**PLANNING**  
DEPARTMENT

# Standards for **Storefront Transparency**

PLANNING CODE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
COMMERCIAL BUSINESSES

SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT | NOVEMBER 2013





### ORGANIZATION:

This document is divided into four sections:

- **Introduction**
- **Visibility Requirements**
- **What This Means for Every Store**
- **Frequently Asked Questions**

## Introduction

The storefront is arguably the most valuable space in a store and should be used to full advantage. A transparent storefront welcomes customers inside with products and services on display, discourages crime with more “eyes on the street,” reduces energy consumption by letting in natural light, and enhances the curb appeal and value of the store and the entire neighborhood. For these reasons the San Francisco Planning Code requires that storefronts must maintain transparent windows that allow visibility into the store. This handout explains these requirements.



## Visibility Requirements

Section 145.1(c)(6) of the Planning Code requires that “frontages with active uses that are not residential or PDR must be fenestrated with transparent windows and doorways for no less than 60 percent of the street frontage at the ground level and allow visibility to the inside of the building.”

To ensure visibility into active spaces, any fenestration of active uses provided at pedestrian eye level must have visibility to the inside of the building. The following definitions apply:

- 1) **Pedestrian Eye Level** includes the space that is between 4 feet and 8 feet in height above the adjacent sidewalk level, following the slope if applicable.



ABOVE: Window signs should be limited in size and number to maximize visibility inside the store.

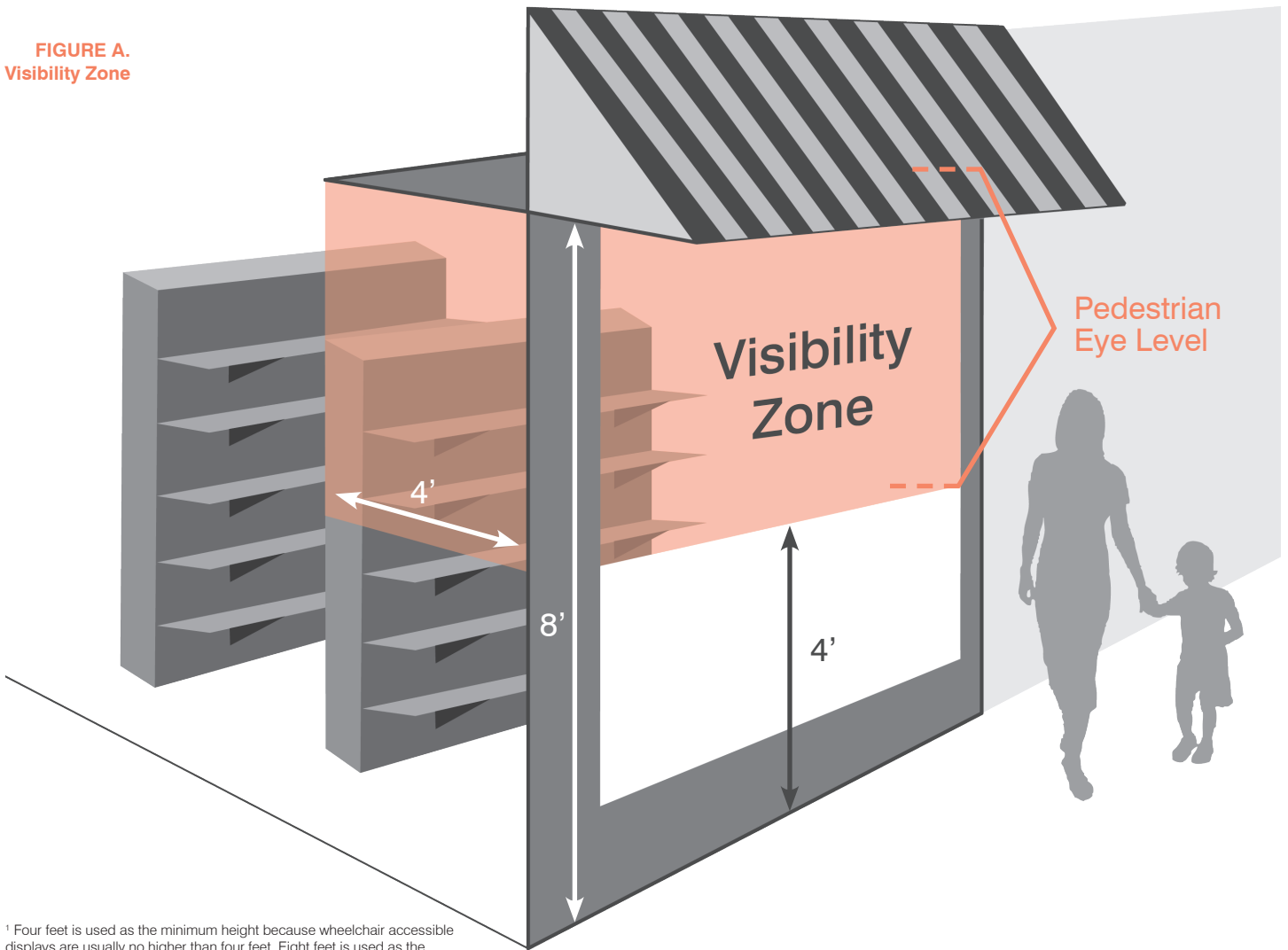
2) **Visibility to the Inside of the Building** means that the area inside the building within 4 feet from the surface of the window glass at pedestrian eye level is at least 75 percent open to perpendicular view.

Therefore, any fenestration of frontages with active uses must have visibility to the inside of the building with at least 75 percent open to perpendicular view within a 4-foot by 4-foot “visibility zone” at pedestrian eye level. This visibility zone is located between 4 feet and 8 feet in height above sidewalk level and extends 4 feet from the surface of the window glass inside the building<sup>1</sup>. Section 145.1(c)(7) of the Planning Code requires that decorative railings or grillwork placed in front of or behind the storefront windows must also

be at least 75 percent open to perpendicular view. Greater transparency, including expanded “visibility zones”, may be required in buildings designated under Article 10 or 11 of the Planning Code (see FAQs on page 6).

Notwithstanding the above visibility requirement, individual products for sale or used in service and on display inside the building are not restricted; and, window signs not exceeding 1/3 the area of the window on or in which the signs are located are not restricted if such signs are permitted by the Planning Code<sup>2</sup>. For more info about business signs, please refer to the Sign Handout on our website at [www.sfplanning.org](http://www.sfplanning.org).

**FIGURE A.**  
Visibility Zone



<sup>1</sup> Four feet is used as the minimum height because wheelchair accessible displays are usually no higher than four feet. Eight feet is used as the maximum height because overhead awnings must maintain an eight-foot clearance above the sidewalk. Four feet is used as the minimum depth because it allows the minimum three-foot path of travel required for wheelchairs plus additional space for a display. Seventy-five percent openness is used because it matches the existing required openness for security gates and grillwork in Section 145.1(c)(7) of the Planning Code.

<sup>2</sup> Window signs that are affixed or adhered directly to the window glass do not require a sign permit. All other business signs must have a sign permit or they are illegal and must be removed.



# What This Means for Every Store

Every merchant and store owner should be sure that their storefront is in full compliance with the Planning Code. Below are the five most common violations to look for.



1) Windows that have been covered over with boards, film, or paint must be restored to transparency.



2) Security gates or grillwork on the inside or outside of the window glass must be primarily transparent (at least 75% open to perpendicular view).



3) Shelving, display cases, appliances and other items placed within four feet of the window glass must be no taller than four feet or be primarily transparent (at least 75% open to perpendicular view).



4) All exterior signs must have a sign permit or must be removed.

5) Business signs affixed to the window (painted or adhered to the glass) can be no larger than one-third the size of the window in which they are placed.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## If my building does not have 60% of its ground floor façade fenestrated with windows and doors do I have to add them?

If your building was legally built with less than the current 60% required fenestration, it is “grandfathered in,” which means it is legally non-complying with regard to the fenestration. In that case all of the existing storefront windows (up to the 60% standard) must be transparent and provide visibility to the inside.

## If my windows have been covered over for several years, aren't they also grandfathered in?

Unless the windows were covered over with a lawfully issued building permit they are not grandfathered in and you must restore them to comply with the storefront transparency requirement.

## If I have a display case within four feet of the window that is filled with products for sale, do I have to reduce the number of products on display so that it is 75 percent open?

Only the display furniture and equipment (when empty) must be 75 % open to view for any portion higher than four feet. Products used in sales or service within a display are not restricted.

## Do I need a building permit to rearrange my store to comply?

In most cases you do not need a building permit to simply rearrange or replace display furniture, but

you should check with the Department of Building Inspection at 415-558-6088 to be sure.

## What if I don't comply?

Until you fully comply with the transparency requirement, you may be subject to enforcement action. In that case there could be a hold on all permit activity for the property ultimately resulting in penalties accruing at a rate of up to \$250 per day.

## Are there any additional requirements for historic properties?

Display fixtures may require a greater setback and area than the minimum “visibility zone” defined in this document. You may also be required to provide more than the minimum 60 percent transparency for windows along the ground- and second-floor street frontage. Please consult with a Department Preservation Planner at the Planning Information Center for additional guidance

## What assistance is available?

The Office of Economic and Workforce Development has numerous technical and financial assistance programs available to help small businesses that are pursuing improvements to their business. For more information, see OEWD's web site:

<http://oewd.org/Neighborhood-Grants-Loans.aspx>



SAN FRANCISCO  
PLANNING  
DEPARTMENT

### FOR MORE INFORMATION: Call or visit the San Francisco Planning Department

#### Central Reception

1650 Mission Street, Suite 400  
San Francisco CA 94103-2479

TEL: **415.558.6378**  
FAX: **415.558.6409**  
WEB: <http://www.sfplanning.org>

#### Planning Information Center (PIC)

1660 Mission Street, First Floor  
San Francisco CA 94103-2479

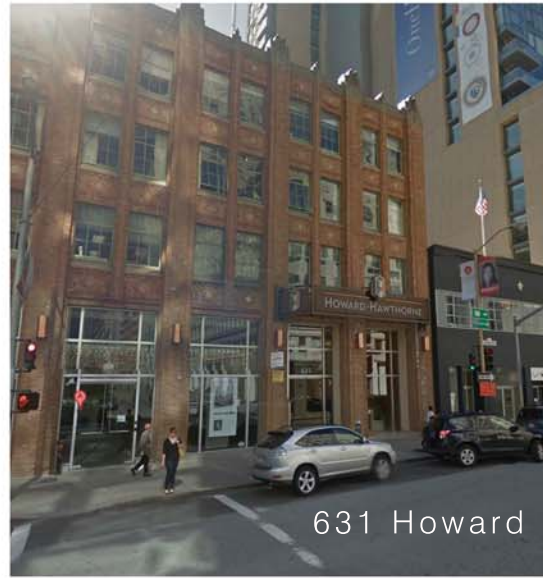
TEL: **415.558.6377**

*Planning staff are available by phone and at the PIC counter.  
No appointment is necessary.*

# NEW MONTGOMERY-MISSION- 2ND ST. CONSERVATION DISTRICT



RHYTHM AND PROPORTION



EARTH/BUFF TONES  
TEXTURES

VARIOUS AWNING



RIALTO BUILDING



HOWARD STREET- ADJCENT TO 650 Howard



147 minna -SFMOMA Garage

# BUILDING PERMITS FOR 650 HOWARD

**Permit:** [8707963](#)  
Form: 3 - ADDITIONS, ALTERATIONS OR REPAIRS  
Filed: 6/8/1987  
Address: 650 HOWARD ST  
Existing: RETAIL SALES  
Proposed: FOOD/BEVERAGE HNDLNG  
Units: 0  
Action: COMPLETE  
Action Date: 3/3/1988  
Description: DEMO, INSTALL STRUCTURAL LATERAL BRACING, ROOF, FLOOR FRAME  
Cost: \$550,000.00

**Permit:** [8917224](#)  
Form: 3 - ADDITIONS, ALTERATIONS OR REPAIRS  
Filed: 9/20/1989  
Address: 650 HOWARD ST  
Existing: NITE CLUB  
Proposed: NITE CLUB  
Units: 0  
Action: EXPIRED  
Action Date: 3/18/1991  
Description: DEMOL. WIND VESTIBULES, REPLACE ENTRY DOORS  
Cost: \$175,000.00

**Permit:** [8919568](#)  
Form: 3 - ADDITIONS, ALTERATIONS OR REPAIRS  
Filed: 10/17/1989  
Address: 650 HOWARD ST  
Existing: FOOD/BEVERAGE HNDLNG  
Proposed: FOOD/BEVERAGE HNDLNG  
Units: 0  
Action: EXPIRED  
Action Date: 1/17/1991  
Description: FURNISH & INSTALL COMPLETE AWNING OVER FRONT OF BLDG  
Cost: \$10,650.00

**Permit:** [9511667](#)  
Form: 3 - ADDITIONS, ALTERATIONS OR REPAIRS  
Filed: 7/26/1995  
Address: 650 HOWARD ST  
Existing: CLUB  
Proposed: CLUB  
Units: 0  
Action: FINAL INSPECT/APPRVD  
Action Date: 8/11/1995  
Description: INSTALL & FAABRICATE 1 AWNING DIMEN 7'HI X 13' PROJECTION  
Cost: \$3,000.00

**Permit:** [9509870](#)  
Form: 8 - ADDITIONS, ALTERATIONS OR REPAIRS - 'I' OCCUPANCY WITH NO PLANS  
Filed: 6/27/1995  
Address: 650 HOWARD ST  
Existing: CLUB  
Proposed: CLUB  
Units: 0  
Action: FINAL INSPECT/APPRVD  
Action Date: 8/11/1995  
Description: CANVAS COVER-COVER EXISTING AWNING  
Cost: \$3,000.00

**Permit:** [200002071184](#)  
Form: 3 - ADDITIONS, ALTERATIONS OR REPAIRS  
Filed: 2/7/2000  
Address: 650 HOWARD ST  
Existing: CLUB  
Proposed: CLUB  
Units: 0  
Action: EXPIRED  
Action Date: 3/19/2001  
Description: REMODEL EXTERIOR FACADE W/GRANITE & MARBLE TILES PAINT & RECOAT (E) DOORS  
Cost: \$15,000.00









MATERIALS (SAMPLES OF TILES SUBMITTED AT PIC 11/04/13)

**DEX**



CONCRETE TILE



PORCELAIN TILE AT COLUMNS



CANOPY MATERIAL (ALUMINUM)