Vision

A primary goal of the Central SoMa Plan is to maintain the diversity of buildings types within the Plan Area while protecting historic resources for future generations.

To prevent demolition or insensitive alterations to significant architectural resources, the Central SoMa Plan proposes that the City should designate significant buildings, affording them additional protections and economic incentives (such as the right to sell their unused development potential).

The buildings in red and orange are existing locally designated significant buildings. The buildings in green would receive their local designation as significant buildings through the Central SoMa Plan.

The buildings to the left and above are examples of individually significant buildings.
To help maintain the diversity of buildings types outside of the downtown, the Central SoMa Plan proposes to prohibit the merger of parcels of land that:

1. Contain either a historic building or one that warrants special consideration, and
2. Would involve street frontages of less than 200 feet

The Plan also proposes to provide economic incentives to new development that would preserve existing buildings by allowing them to count against their “TDR” requirement.

The buildings above are examples of building on lots where lot mergers would be prohibited.
Vision
The vision of the Central SoMa Plan is to provide a safe, accessible, and attractive walking environment for all streets of the Plan Area by requiring that the ground floor of new buildings successfully engage with the street and outside world.

Without Regulations
In the past, the City did not regulate the design of ground floors. In many cases, this led to buildings that ignored any association with the street, creating the kinds of undesirable conditions that people on foot tend to avoid.

For people walking, bare walls and ground floors dominated by non-public uses (such as offices) are dull and disconnecting.

When there are too many driveways, people on foot are endangered or disrupted by constant vehicular movement across the sidewalk.

When buildings are set back from the sidewalk, people on foot feel more exposed and less safe.
Existing Regulations

In recent years, the City has enacted numerous regulations to improve the interaction between the ground floor of buildings and their surrounding areas, leading to safer and more active streets.

Clear views inside and high ceilings create a sense of interest, connection, and spaciousness.

Limiting curb cuts and requiring buildings to extend to the property line creates an uninterrupted and safe environment for people walking.
Proposed Controls

The Central SoMa Plan proposes to implement the following strategies:

1. Prohibit offices fronting the street
2. Require active commercial and/or community-serving uses along 4th Street from Bryant north to Folsom Street, and from Folsom Street west to 6th Street.
3. Require new privately-owned public open spaces (POPOS) to be lined with active commercial and/or community-serving uses.
4. Require PDR uses on the ground floor of new office buildings. Allow PDR and arts uses to count as “active commercial,” as long as they have transparent storefronts similar to those required of retail.
5. Prohibit new curb cuts on Folsom, Brannan, Townsend, Second, 3rd, 4th, and 6th Streets within the Plan Area (as well as the south side of Howard Street if it continues as a one-way street). Additionally, a Conditional Use Permit would be required for new curb cuts along Harrison, Bryant, and Fifth Streets, as well as Howard if it becomes a two-way street.

An existing POPOS in Central SoMa (303 2nd Street) lined with active uses.

Many PDR uses benefit from actively engaging the street – especially those with a retail component.
Vision
The vision of the Central SoMa Plan is to support substantial density while maintaining significant light, air, and sun access to the streets.

Mid-rise Development
Central SoMa is primarily designed to be a mid-rise district, with buildings of 85 feet to 160 feet. To support this density while still supporting light, air, and sun access to the streets, the Plan proposes to:

Simultaneously provide openness to the sky and architectural diversity
Between 85 to 160 feet in height, buildings will be required to substantially reduce what is visible from the street. Individual buildings will have architectural flexibility on how to achieve this goal.

Ensure thinner towers than in downtown
The maximum floor size will be 15,000 square feet for office uses, and residential and hotel uses could not exceed 12,000 square feet. The maximum length of any side of a tower will be 150 feet.

High-rise Development
Central SoMa will allow a handful of buildings taller than 160 feet, to punctuate important intersections (such as at the Caltrain station). To support height at these locations while still supporting light, air, and sun access to the streets, the Plan proposes to:

Create a clear streetwall
At 85 feet in height, buildings will be required to have a 15 foot setback along every property line.

Ensure thinner towers than in downtown
The maximum floor size will be 15,000 square feet for office uses, and residential and hotel uses could not exceed 12,000 square feet. The maximum length of any side of a tower will be 150 feet.

Keep towers separated
Towers could not be any closer than 115 feet (the width of street plus required setbacks) unless they had substantially smaller floor sizes.

Create a clear streetwall
At 85 feet in height, buildings will be required to have a 15 foot setback along every property line.

Alleys and Small Streets
Small streets and alleys in Central SoMa offer special neighborhood character. To maintain this character by supporting light, air, and sun access to these streets, the Plan proposes to:

Ensure sun access to the north side of the street
Development on the south side of small streets and alleys will be required to step back at a 45 degree angle from the street (in keeping with current Planning Code requirements). This requirement will be extended to the south side of “north-south” alleys in addition to “east-west” alleys.

Ensure light and air to the south side of the street
Development on the north side of small streets and alleys buildings will be required to substantially reduce what is visible from the street. Individual buildings will have architectural flexibility on how to achieve this goal.
How does it look from the street?
The proposed bulk controls result in more sky and light at the street level.

Mid-rise Development

No bulk controls

Draft Plan Controls: Setbacks only

Current Proposal: Setbacks with apparent mass reductions

What’s different?

Bigger Sky
The streetwalls open up and people on the street see and feel more of the sky.

More sunlight
Sculpted building tops shape and provide more light on the ground.

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How does it look from the street?
The proposed bulk controls result in more sky and light at the street level.

High-rise Development

No bulk controls

Draft Plan/Current Proposal:
Setbacks and floorplate area controls

Alleys and Small Streets

No bulk controls

Draft Plan/Current Proposal:
Sun angle and setbacks

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What kinds of buildings would result?

The apparent mass reduction encourages architects to be more creative in how they reduce what is visible from the street.
Getting Technical: how does the apparent mass reduction work?

An apparent mass reduction reduces the visual impact of density and allows architects more design flexibility than traditional setbacks.

Measuring the reduction

While the apparent mass reduction is a small effort in calculation, this can be done easily in software commonly available to architects:

1. To test a design, first draw lines from the opposite of the street lot lines to points or corners on the building above 85'.
2. Then make a plane from the project property line along the street up to the remaining height of the building.
3. Where those lines intersect that plane, draw connecting lines to show the “projected” face of the building.
4. By comparing the full plane with the plane just made, one can calculate the percent reduction.

Example

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Getting Technical: which parts of the building are reduced?

The amount of reduction required depends on site orientation.

**On Major Streets**

North side goal:
reduce Apparent Mass
of Upper Building
(as seen from opposite
sidewalk)
by
50%

South side goal:
reduce Apparent Mass
of Upper Building
(as seen from opposite
sidewalk)
by
67%

The required 15' stepback
reduces apparent mass by ~45%

The additional ~24% reduction
of apparent mass
can take many forms

**On Small Streets and Alleys**

North side goal:
reduce Apparent Mass
of Upper Building
(as seen from opposite
sidewalk)
by
85%

South side goal:
reduce Apparent Mass
of Upper Building
(as seen from opposite
sidewalk)
by
100%

The required 15' stepback
reduces apparent mass by ~35%

The additional ~45% reduction
of apparent mass
can take many forms

While the reductions are shown as “stepbacks,” this is only a graphic device to express the building edge, not design expectations.
Vision

The Plan’s vision is for Central SoMa to become the first regenerative neighborhood in San Francisco – a true “eco-district” where urban development returns more to the environment than it takes. The result will be one of the most sustainable urban places on the planet, serving the daily needs of the community and at the forefront of action on global climate change.

What are Our Challenges?

The Central SoMa Plan offers the opportunity to ensure new growth addresses present and future environmental challenges such as global climate change, increasing resource needs, sea-level rise and disaster preparedness.

- Climate Change
- Disaster Preparedness
- Increasing Resource Needs
- Sea Level Rise
**EXISTING CONDITIONS**

Central SoMa's current environmental conditions are typical of a dense urban area.

**PREDICTED CONDITIONS**

Projected conditions are influenced by expected new development and climate change.

Resource consumption in Central SoMa is expected to increase by 40 Megawatts (peak energy demand), 2.8 million gallons of water per day, and 20,000 tons of solid waste per year.

Precipitation levels are projected to fluctuate between dry and wet extremes.

Over half of San Francisco's greenhouse gas emissions come from buildings. Transportation emissions are the second largest source.

Only 10% of water brought in from Hetch Hetchy is re-used - the majority is used once before becoming wastewater.

90% of Central SoMa is covered in impermeable surfaces and its tree canopy is one of the lowest in the city.

Extreme heat events (above 85°F) are projected to increase in both length and frequency. Temperatures are expected to increase 4–6 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100.

Predictions indicate that sea levels will rise 7-15” by 2050 and 26-46” by 2100. Extreme storm events are expected to increase by 11%.

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Source: PG&E

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Targets and Goals

Achieving an environmentally “regenerative” Central SoMa will require meeting all of the City’s existing environmental targets and proposing even higher ones, where possible. Targets under consideration include:

**Climate & Energy**
- Carbon Neutral by 2050.
- 100% of energy consumed by buildings to be generated from renewable resources by 2030.
- 50% of this renewable energy to be generated within the Plan Area, through rooftop solar or other means.

**Water**
- Reduce potable water use in existing and new buildings through efficiency and re-use.
- Strive to achieve a dramatic reduction in the discharge of water - either as wastewater or stormwater by 2030.

**Habitat & Ecosystem**
- Double Central SoMa’s tree canopy by 2030.
- Double Central SoMa’s permeable surfaces by 2030.
- Substantially increase high quality habitat and habitat connectivity.

**Solid Waste**
- Achieve Zero Waste by 2020

**Strategy #1** - Make Existing Buildings More Efficient
**Strategy #2** - Construct “Net Zero” Buildings
**Strategy #3** - Generate and Share Renewable Energy
**Strategy #4** - Build Green Energy Infrastructure

**Strategy #1** - Increase Efficiency
**Strategy #2** - Diversify the Water Supply
**Strategy #3** - Explore the possibility of a Low to Zero Wastewater District

**Strategy #1** - Integrate the Built and Natural Environment in Central SoMa
**Strategy #2** - Plant to Create Wildlife Habitat, Water Conservation and a Greener, Cooler Urban Environment
**Strategy #3** - Connect Residents to Local Nature to Engender a Deeper Sense of Place and Community Stewardship

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