

## IV.B Aesthetics

### IV.B.1 Introduction

This section describes existing visual conditions in the Central SoMa Plan (the Plan Area) and analyzes the potential for the Plan to affect those conditions. This section focuses primarily on the visual character of the Plan Area, views of the Plan Area from public vantage points throughout the city, and light and glare issues.

Computer-generated visual massing studies presented as part of the analysis illustrate existing and potential conditions within select view corridors from representative public vantage points. The locations of the massing studies were selected in consultation with city staff. Digitized photographs and computer modeling techniques were utilized to prepare the massing diagrams. The images show “wire frame” illustrations, which are based on height and bulk districts proposed by the Plan. The images do not show architectural detail or implementation of street network changes, as specific architectural plans for subsequent projects are not part of this review.

Photographs are included in this section to supplement the description of publicly-accessible views and analysis of visual character. The location and direction of the illustrative views are indicated on **Figure IV.B-1, Viewpoint Location Map**.

### IV.B.2 Environmental Setting

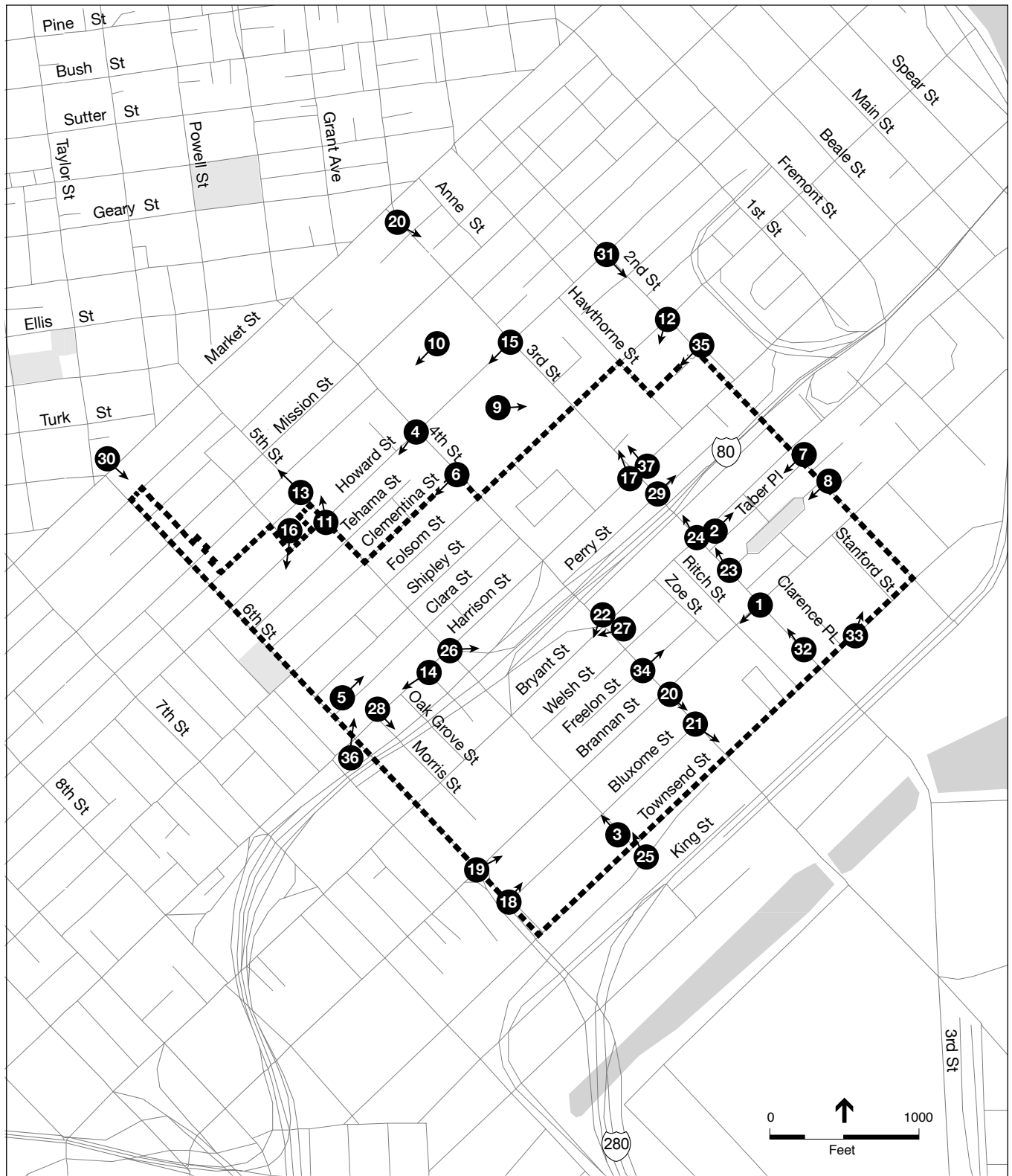
#### Visual Character

The visual character of a city or a part of a city, such as the Plan Area, is comprised of a number of physical elements that in combination form a city’s image. This EIR uses the terms *paths*, *edges*, *districts*, *nodes*, and *landmarks*<sup>72</sup> to describe the physical features in the Plan area and vicinity’s visual setting. *Paths* are routes, streets, sidewalks, and other channels through which people move about the Plan Area. *i* are boundaries and breaks in continuity, such as walls, building frontages and waterfronts. *Districts* are relatively large sections of the city with a distinctive identity or character. *Nodes* are strategic intersections, loci or focal points for orientation, like squares, plazas or even transit stations. *Landmarks* are external points of orientation, which identify an area within the broader landscape. *Legibility* refers to the degree to which these physical elements are visible and definable within the landscape, and is one factor in determining a places’ visual character.

The aesthetic setting of the Plan Area is varied. It reflects the visual characteristics of its natural and built elements, including topography, street grid, buildings (individually and collectively), parks and public open spaces, and major transportation infrastructure. The roughly 230-acre Plan Area occupies the central portion of the City’s South of Market area and borders the visually distinct Financial District and Downtown areas to the north, the Transit Center District and Rincon Hill areas to the east, China Basin and Mission Bay to the south, and the Western South of Market (SoMa) neighborhood to the west.

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<sup>72</sup> Adapted from Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960).



Plan Area   
 # Photograph View Direction and Reference Number

SOURCE: ESA

Case No. 2011.1356E: Central SoMa Plan

**Figure IV.B-1**  
 Viewpoint Location Map

## *Topography*

The Plan Area's topography slopes gradually northward from an elevation of 0 feet SFD<sup>73</sup> in the south to about 25 feet, SFD along Howard Street near the Plan Area's northern boundary. The high point of the Plan Area reaches 50 feet SFD on the western slope of Rincon Hill at the intersection of Second and Harrison Streets, but the topography of much of the South of Market Area, including the Plan Area within its center, is nearly flat.

## *Street Grid and Block Pattern*

SoMa streets are the primary public pathways that facilitate access to and through SoMa and establish the Plan Area's scale. As described in Section IV.A, Land Use and Land Use Planning, SoMa's block pattern, which includes the Plan area, is expressed by a continuous grid of 82.6-foot-wide streets. North/south "numbered" streets are spaced 825 feet apart (between Second and Fourth Streets in the Plan Area), while "named" east/west streets (between Mission and Townsend Streets) are spaced 550 feet apart.<sup>74</sup> The land area between these streets form large "SoMa blocks" of approximately 10.5 acres each that are in many cases subdivided into smaller sub-blocks, accessible from local streets and mid-block alleys. Many local streets (e.g., Holland Ct, Gallagher, Lapu Lapu, Falmouth, and Merlin Streets) terminate in the interior of these large blocks.

The character of the area's public rights-of-way is defined by the automobile and its related uses. The area's streets are wider than those north of Market Street, many are one-way and convey traffic in four and five lanes. Curb-side parking is located on both sides of SoMa streets (see **Figure IV.B-2, View Corridors: Major Streets**, for representative views of major streets).

From the pedestrian perspective, visually, the roadbeds (visual relief) are the open areas between large blocks. Collectively, streets represent the largest amount of public open space in the area. The character of these open areas is dynamic because of the many lanes that accommodate cars and trucks in motion. The streets' "edges" are the areas dedicated to pedestrian use, and are narrow, generally between 12-15 feet, and in some cases none existent. The edges also function as public spaces that are the transitional zones to private property. In general, sidewalks meet the *Better Streets Plan* recommended 15-foot width, such as on Fourth Street between Mission and Folsom Street, on New Montgomery, and along portions of Mission and Howard Streets. Sidewalks on Howard Street and some blocks of Fourth, Folsom, and Townsend Streets meet the *Better Streets Plan* minimum 12-foot width. However, as shown in Figure II-8, Sidewalk Conditions & Proposed Pedestrian Crosswalks, the other sidewalks on major streets within the Plan Area do not meet the minimum width, and can be as narrow as 8 feet, thereby creating a tighter urban fabric with less visual relief available on wider sidewalks from the pedestrian perspective. There are more variations in the total width and the sidewalk width of local streets, but most have a 35-foot right-of-way, and six-foot sidewalks are common (see **Figure IV.B-3, View Corridors: Minor Streets/Alleys**, for representative views of local streets). Thirty-five-foot-wide streets typically have one travel lane and one curbside parking lane in a 23-foot-wide roadbed. These local streets provide the least amount of open area and visual relief from the urban street wall due to the narrowness of the street and sidewalk. Some minor street sidewalks are missing or do not meet the 6-foot minimum width recommended by the *Better Streets Plan*.

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<sup>73</sup> SFD, or San Francisco City Datum, establishes the City's zero point for surveying purposes at approximately eight feet above mean sea level.

<sup>74</sup> Following San Francisco convention, Mission Street and streets parallel to it are considered to run east/west, while numbered streets parallel to Mission Street are considered to run north/south.





1 - View west from Brannan and Third Streets



2 - View east from Bryant and Third Streets



3 - View north from Fifth and Townsend Streets

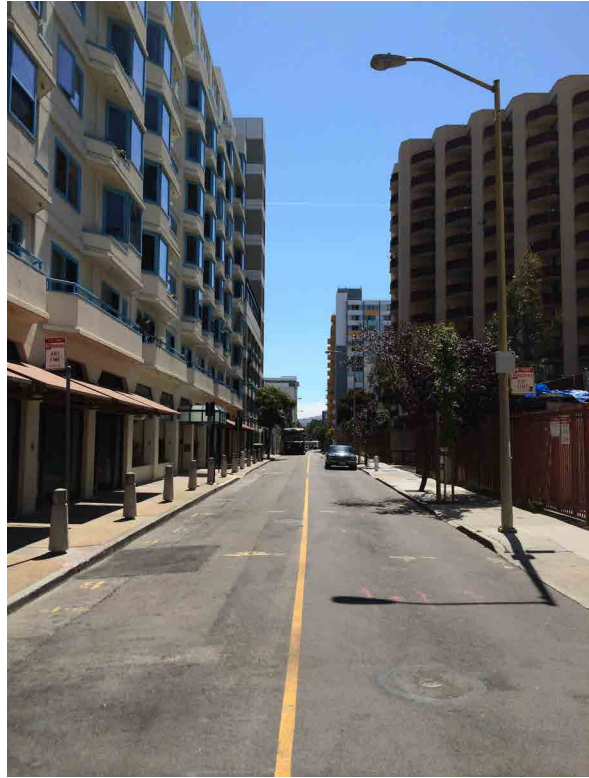


4 - View west of the south side of Howard Street from Fourth Street

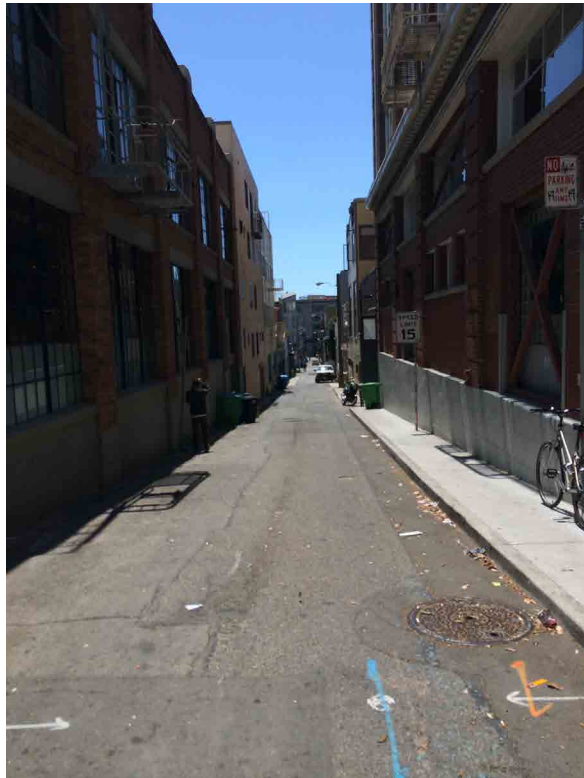




5. View east from Clara and Sixth Streets



6. View west from Clementina and Fourth Streets



7. View west from Taber Alley and Second Street

## *Open Spaces*

Public open spaces contribute to a neighborhood's identity, serve as visual focal points, and provide visual relief to densely developed built environments. Within the Plan Area public open space is limited. The *San Francisco General Plan (General Plan)* identifies the South of Market as an area with the highest priority for acquisition of new parks and open space areas. The Plan Area's two existing open spaces include a community garden and small neighborhood park. Alice Street Community Gardens is a roughly third-of-an-acre garden located in the middle of the block off of Lapu Lapu Street. Office and residential buildings flank the garden on its north, south, and east edges to create a vegetated central courtyard. South Park is an oval-shaped neighborhood park located in the interior of the block bounded by Bryant, Second, Brannan, and Third Streets. The park is ringed by moderately-scaled residential and commercial buildings, accessible via several narrow streets that create an enclosed intimate setting that contrasts with building frontages exposed to SoMa's wide streets that are typical of the Plan Area.

Outside of the Plan Area, Yerba Buena Gardens and Children's Garden include a lawn, fountain, and public walkways shaded by mature trees. On its southern block, the Children's Garden includes a play area and amphitheater. Other open spaces north of the freeway are pedestrian passages, such as Westin Plaza (which connects Jessie Square to Third Street) and Yerba Buena Lane (which connects Market Street to Mission Street).

The visual characteristics of these spaces are illustrated on **Figure IV.B-4, Parks and Publicly-Accessible Open Spaces**.

## *Building Uses and Built Form*

The type and distribution of land uses and building types within the Plan Area contribute to its existing visual character. Given SoMa's historical development with light industrial uses predominant on the major streets, and residential uses limited to mid-block alleys, the Plan Area and vicinity contains a wide range of land uses often located side-by-side or even in the same building, with no one land use predominating. This includes a substantial number of housing units, including a number of new, larger residential buildings, along with offices, industrial spaces, retail spaces, and cultural and social institutions. The result of the relatively even distribution of light industrial and mixed-use buildings on major streets, combined with the predominantly residential buildings found on local streets, creates a visual character in the Plan Area defined by wide streets with more visual relief from the street wall, juxtaposed with more narrow streets with less open space, but more human in scale, which is appropriate for their residential function. A representative range of building types, height and bulk, and facades within the Plan Area and vicinity is shown in **Figure IV.B-5** through **Figure IV.B-8**.

A variety of building styles and ages are visually represented in Plan Area streetscapes. With limited exception, many buildings were constructed in the period immediately following the 1906 earthquake and fire when SoMa's reconstruction solidified it as a mixed-use industrial neighborhood. Other significant periods of construction include redevelopment beginning in the 1960s and contemporary buildings built within the past 15 years. Building facades comprise a range of materials consistent with the range of building types and uses in the Plan Area. Several buildings have glass and steel curtain walls, resulting in transparent and/or reflective surfaces. Other buildings have concrete, masonry, or wooden facades.



8. View of the east side of South Park



9. View of the Yerba Buena Children's Garden



10. View of Yerba Buena Gardens





11. View of the northeast corner at Fifth and Howard Streets



12. View of the southwest corner at Folsom and Second Streets



13. View north from Fourth and Howard Streets



14. View west of the north side of Harrison Street between Fifth and Sixth Streets



15. View west from Howard and Third Streets



16. View west of the south side of Howard Street between Fifth and Sixth Streets

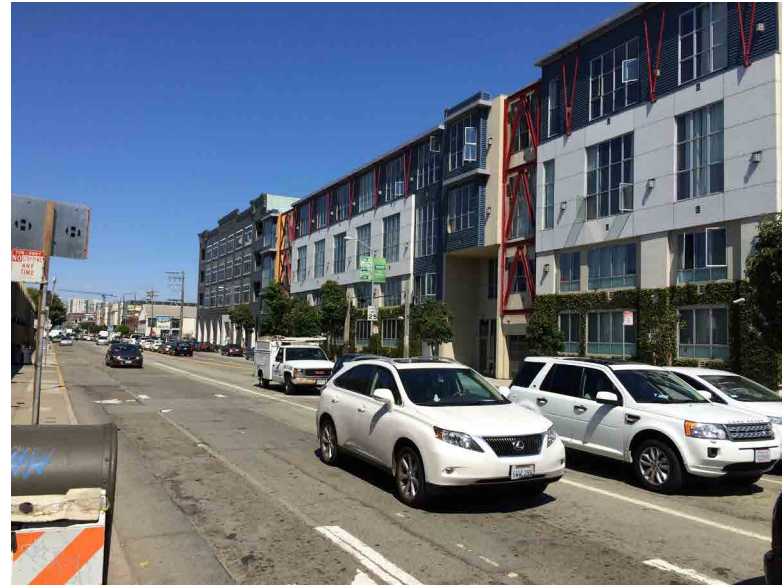


17. View north of the west side of Harrison Street from Third Street





18. View east of the north side of Bluxome Street from Sixth Street



19. View east of the south side of Brannan Street from Sixth Street



20. View south of the east side of Fourth Street from Brannan Street



21. View south of the east side of Fourth Street from Bluxome Street

SOURCE: ESA

Case No. 2011.1356E: Central SoMa Plan

**Figure IV.B-7**  
South of Freeway Built Character

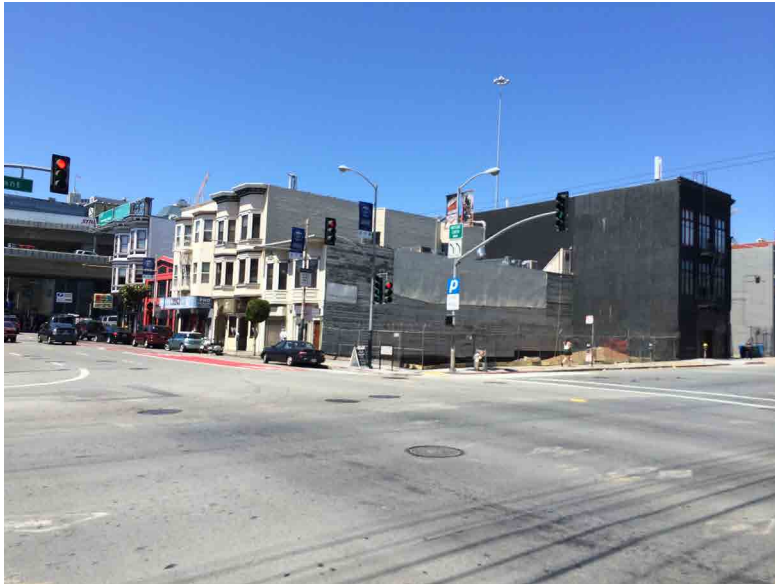




22. View of the southwest corner of Bryant and Fourth Streets



23. View north of the east side of Third Street from South Park Street



24. View north of the east side of Third Street from Bryant Street



25. View north of the east side Fifth Street from Townsend Street

SOURCE: ESA

Case No. 2011.1356E: Central SoMa Plan

**Figure IV.B-8**  
South of Freeway Built Character

The northern portion of the Plan Area and its vicinity generally contains low- to mid-rise residential buildings, including a substantial number of senior and affordable housing developments that are clustered around Third and Fourth Streets.<sup>75</sup> Toward Mission Street, north of the Plan area, regionally important museums and cultural facilities create a visual transition to the taller buildings in the Downtown.

High-rise towers are clustered in various parts of the Plan Area and its surroundings. Those to the north of Howard Street just east of Fourth Street are visually subordinate in height and exhibit a distinct character from those in Downtown. Zoning in the Downtown core and Transit Center District permit the tallest buildings in the city, where the Transit tower will reach a height of up to 1,000 feet. Recently adopted height limits in the Transit Center District area step down from 1,000 feet to 700 and 550 feet, which is the maximum height permitted in the Financial District. Downtown buildings (some of which are taller than 20 stories) create a visual backdrop to the more mid-rise-scaled towers in the South of Market and the Plan Area, where maximum permitted heights are predominantly 85 feet, considerably shorter than Downtown's larger office towers in the background. An exception is the Intercontinental Hotel at the northeast corner of Fifth and Howard Streets.

The portion of the Plan Area south of the I-80 freeway contains more fine-grained development featuring primarily office, industrial, retail, and entertainment uses. This area is dominated by light industrial zoning, which does not allow new housing, except deed-restricted affordable housing, or office uses, except in historic buildings. These use restrictions have effectively preserved the low-scale and low-density character of this area, with buildings generally ranging between 50 and 85 feet tall. Additionally, maximum building heights are four to eight stories, which is lower than the portion of the Plan Area north of Harrison Street.

The Plan Area and its vicinity lack a high degree of visual definition or coherence beyond that of a mid-rise neighborhood. Therefore, the existing visual character of the Plan Area and its vicinity is mostly defined by its location and prevailing urban form, the geometry and scale of its street grid and surrounding transportation infrastructure, and its variety of building types.

The visual character of the area just two blocks north of the Plan Area is dominated by large, relatively shorter structures on large lots. Yerba Buena Gardens, the Metreon, and the Moscone Convention Center span the two blocks bounded by Mission, Fourth, Folsom, and Third Streets, with a mix of low- and mid-rise commercial, commercial support, and institutional buildings surrounding public open spaces. The convention center, which is primarily underground, has low-rise facades that stretch along the frontages of Howard and Folsom Streets. On the southern block, frontages are set back along Third and Fourth Streets, where there is below-grade loading dock access. These two large blocks create a visual break from the high-rise buildings to the north and northeast.<sup>76</sup>

To the west, at the northwest corner of Fourth Street at Howard Street, is the convention center's "Moscone West," which is a mid-rise exhibition hall. Adjacent to the Convention Center, along the length of Mission Street between Fourth Street and Fifth Street, is the Fifth and Mission parking garage, which comprises eight floors of parking.

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<sup>75</sup> Low-rise buildings generally range from one to eight stories in height; mid-rise buildings generally range from nine to 15 stories in height; and high-rise buildings generally range from 16 stories in height and up.

<sup>76</sup> Expansion of Moscone Center was approved by the Planning Commission in 2014 (Case No. 2013.0154E) and will result in an increase in the height of both Moscone North and, especially, Moscone South, which will be approximately 95 feet tall.

A swath of land ringing this area north of the freeway, but within the Plan Area, is occupied by a number of eight- to 12-story housing developments, including several affordable housing buildings, with ground-floor retail. Taller buildings here are between 85 and 130 feet in height, and are interspersed among mid- and low-rise buildings.

### *Freeways*

The elevated I-80 freeway runs east/west through the Plan Area between approximately 30 and 50 feet in the air, crossing over all major north/south streets between Harrison and Bryant Streets. The freeway creates a visual separation that divides the Plan Area, and visually obstructs street level views within the Plan Area, as well as through-views in the north-south direction. Low-rise, relatively lower-activity buildings adjacent to the freeway keep sidewalk activity relatively light, as well as magnify the freeway's prominence when observed in mid-range views. Two entrance ramps and two exit ramps dominate the block bounded by Harrison, Bryant, Fourth, and Fifth Streets. These ramps connect to city streets diagonally at the four corners, creating five-way intersections where the most prominent visual feature is the broad expanse of asphalt. In addition, I-280 terminates at the intersection of Sixth Street and Brannan Streets, at the southwest corner of the Plan Area. (The King Street terminus of I-280 is outside the Plan area.) These visual characteristics are shown in **Figure IV.B-9, Freeways and Ramps**.

## Visual Resources and Scenic Views

### *Visual Resources*

The Plan Area lacks substantial topographic relief and does not possess individual natural landscape features with high scenic resource value. With limited exceptions, the Plan Area likewise does not contain built features with high scenic resource value, nor does it contain a visually remarkable diversity of vegetation.

The Plan Area contains a number of notable buildings although, as a whole, it does not possess what would generally be termed "high scenic quality." While many buildings are comparable to one another in terms of massing, façade materials, and architectural details, several contain distinct visual attributes either at the street level, or which can be perceived in short- or mid-range views.<sup>77</sup>

Other notable buildings in the Plan Area and its vicinity include the Old Mint (88 Fifth Street), with its classical revival architecture, and the gothic revival-turned-Art Deco San Francisco Chronicle building across Mission Street. North of the Plan area is the New-Montgomery-Mission-Second Street Conservation District, which is characterized by three- to 11-story brick or concrete commercial loft buildings with differentiated upper floors, some with ornamental cornices. In addition, the Market Street Theater and Loft District runs along the south side of Market Street between Fifth and Sixth Streets. See **Figure IV.B-10, Historic Districts**, for examples of buildings within historic districts in the Plan Area and its vicinity.

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<sup>77</sup> In general, short-range views are those within one-quarter of a mile, mid-range views extend from one-half of a mile to one mile, and long-range views extend beyond one mile.





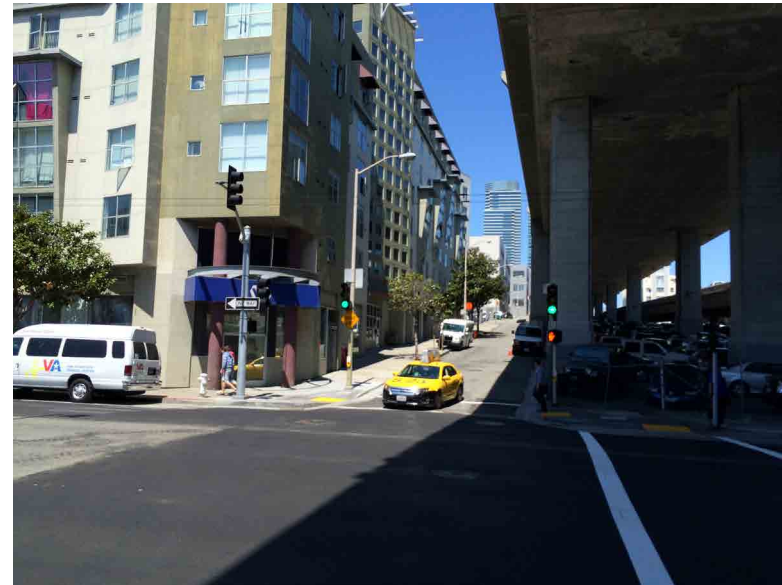
26. View southeast from Fifth and Harrison Streets



27. View northwest from Fourth and Bryant Streets



28. View south of Morris Street from Harrison Street



29. View east of Perry Street from Third Street



30. View of buildings on the south side of Market Street between Fifth and Sixth Streets located in the Market Street Theater and Loft Historic District



31. View of buildings on the west side of Second Street between Mission and Minna Streets located in the New Montgomery-Mission-Second Street Conservation District



32. View of buildings on the east side of Third Street between Brannan and Townsend Streets located in the South End Historic District



33. View of buildings on the north side of Townsend Street between Clarence Place and Stanford Streets located in the South End Historic District

SOURCE: ESA

Case No. 2011.1356E: Central SoMa Plan

**Figure IV.B-10**  
Historic Districts



In the Plan Area, south of I-80, there are fewer distinctive buildings and open spaces. Buildings are generally two to three stories tall, exhibit a mix of architectural styles, housing residential and ground-floor commercial uses. The South End Historic District extends into the Plan Area along Second Street, Brannan Street, and Townsend Street, and includes several historic brick warehouse buildings that have been renovated, expanded, and adapted for contemporary uses. The buildings are primarily warehouses characterized by solid walls of brick and reinforced concrete. (Please see Section IV.D, Cultural and Paleontological Resources, for a discussion of the existing historic buildings and districts in the Plan Area and its vicinity.) The Plan Area, particularly in the southern portion, contains several underutilized parcels, as shown in **Figure IV.B-11, Parking Lots and Underutilized Spaces**.

The Urban Design Element of the *General Plan* classifies some streets in terms of their importance as visual resources as well as quality of street views that are available from vantage points along those streets. In the project vicinity, Market Street, which is north of the Plan Area, is characterized as a street containing a “Street View of Important Building and Street That Defines City Form.” Some blocks of Mission Street and Howard Street, as well as interior minor streets within those blocks, are designated as having street views of important buildings, including Yerba Buena Gardens and the San Francisco Mint building. Market Street is identified as having a street view of an important building: the San Francisco Ferry Building on The Embarcadero. South Park Street and Jack London Alley are identified as “Streets That Extend the Effect of Public Open Space.” No other streets within the Plan Area or its vicinity are characterized as streets important to urban design and views.

## Views

The representative views described in this section are included on the Visual Simulations Location Map (**Figure IV.B-12, Visual Simulations Location Map**). This discussion of publicly-accessible views of and through the Plan Area is supplemented by photographs of existing conditions that are presented in **Figure IV.B-13** through **Figure IV.B-23**, in the analysis of project impacts. View corridors presented in the discussion below are described by physical elements, such as buildings, that guide lines of sight and control view directions available to pedestrians and motorists. View corridors include the total field of vision visible from a specific vantage point. Public view corridors are areas in which views are available from publicly-accessible viewpoints, such as from city streets, bridges, freeways, parks, and other public spaces.

Most major streets in the Plan Area and its vicinity are characterized by the *General Plan* as having an “average” quality of views, with views along Mission, Howard, and Folsom Streets between Second and Third Streets characterized as having “good” quality of street views. I-80 is classified as having an important street view for orientation. No other street segments are specifically characterized by the *General Plan* in terms of view quality along those streets.

## Views of the Plan Area from Surrounding Vantage Points

The Plan Area is visible from city hillsides as well as elevated freeway segments. As illustrated in the long-range visual simulations in **Figure IV.B-13** through **Figure IV.B-19**, which generally consist of views greater than one mile, the Plan Area is visible from higher elevations in the city. From these vantage points, the Plan area appears urbanized and generally built-out with a mix of predominantly low- and mid-rise buildings in the southern portion and mid- and high-rise structures in the northern portion. From the Potrero Hill location



34. View east from Fourth and Freelon Streets



35. View west from Second Street and Dow Place



36. View of the northeast corner of Sixth and Harrison Streets



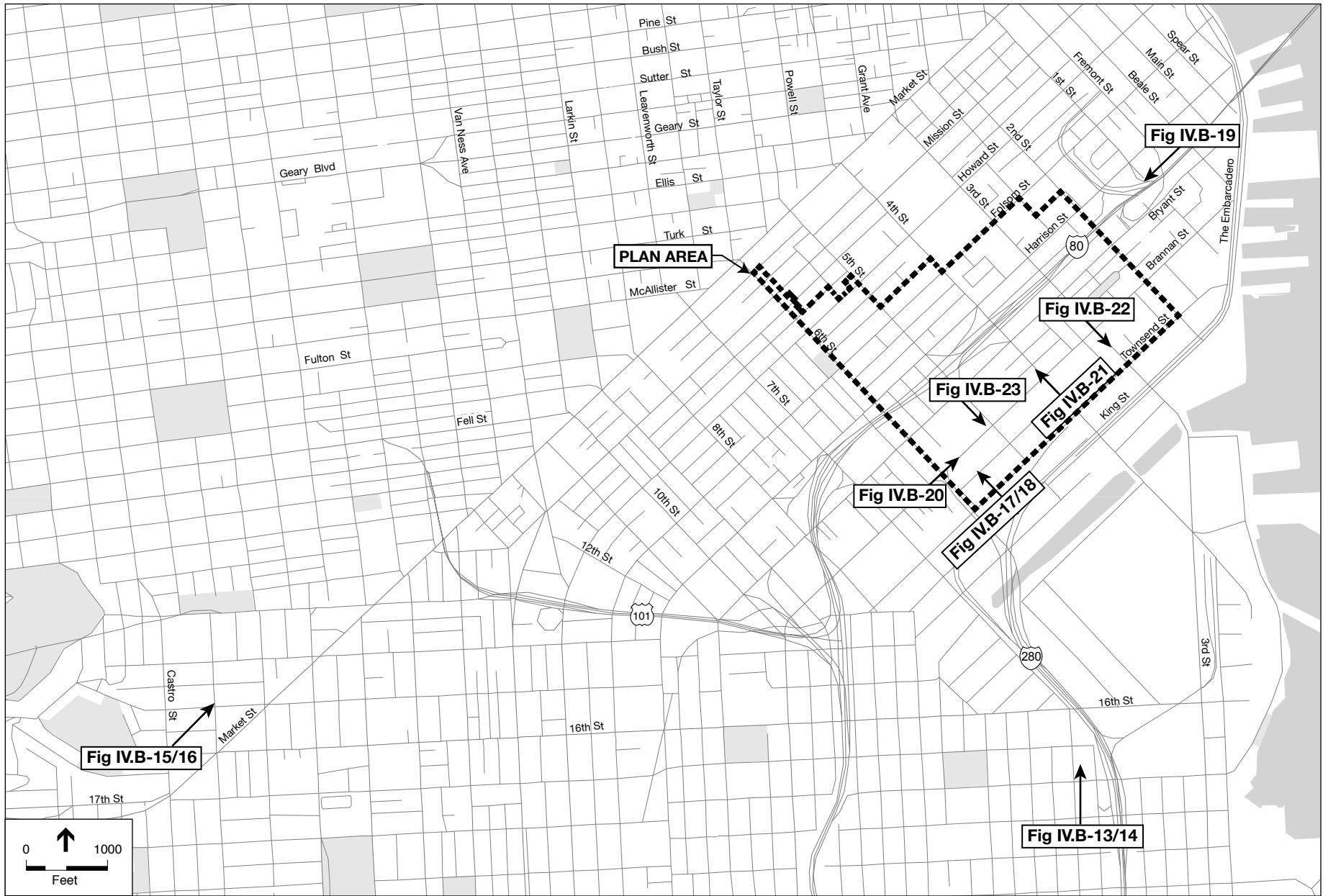
37. View of the northeast corner of Third and Harrison Streets

SOURCE: ESA

Case No. 2011.1356E: Central SoMa Plan

**Figure IV.B-11**  
Parking Lots and Underutilized Spaces





SOURCE: ESA

Case No. 2011.1356E: Central SoMa Plan  
**Figure IV.B-12**  
 Visual Simulations Location Map

(**Figure IV.B-13, Long-Range Visual Simulation: Texas Street and 19th Street: Existing Conditions Plus Plan**, and **Figure IV.B-14, Long-Range Visual Simulation: Texas Street and 19th Street: Existing Conditions Plus Plan and Cumulative**), the Plan Area is distinguishable between the I-280 elevated freeway and the high-rises Downtown, primarily behind the Plan Area. The view from Corona Heights (**Figure IV.B-15, Long-Range Visual Simulation: Corona Heights Park: Existing Conditions Plus Plan**, and **Figure IV.B-16, Long-Range Visual Simulation: Corona Heights Park: Existing Conditions Plus Plan and Cumulative**) is more distant. In this view, the northern portion of Central SoMa is obscured by high-rise buildings in areas along Market Street, Van Ness Avenue, Ninth Street, Polk Street, Fell Street, and Hayes Street. The Plan Area's mid- and low-rise buildings are visible farther to the south, where they blend in with the surrounding development. This lower built form extends south of the Plan Area and across Mission Bay, although there, the larger scale of buildings is evident.

In-mid-range views, consisting of views generally within a half-mile of the Plan Area, the Plan buildings are more discernible from the surrounding development. On the Sixth Street exit from I-280 over Mission Creek (**Figure IV.B-17, Mid-Range Visual Simulation: Interstate 280 Sixth Street Off Ramp: Existing Conditions Plus Plan**, and **Figure IV.B-18, Mid-Range Visual Simulation: Interstate 280 Sixth Street Off-Ramp: Existing Conditions Plus Plan and Cumulative**), low-rise buildings are visible in the south and the high-rises of Rincon Hill and Downtown are visible to the north. To a viewer travelling west on I-80 from the Bay Bridge (**Figure IV.B-19, Mid-Range Visual Simulation: Interstate 80 Westbound: Existing Conditions Plus Plan**), most of the Plan Area's built form is not visible as the elevated freeway obscures most of the area; only fleeting views of a few mid-rise buildings that are tall enough to be seen from the roadway deck is possible. Billboards are present on both sides of the freeway. To the west in the long-range view, the natural and built areas of the Diamond Heights and Twin Peaks neighborhoods are visible. Views are also partially obscured by towers in the Rincon Hill neighborhood.

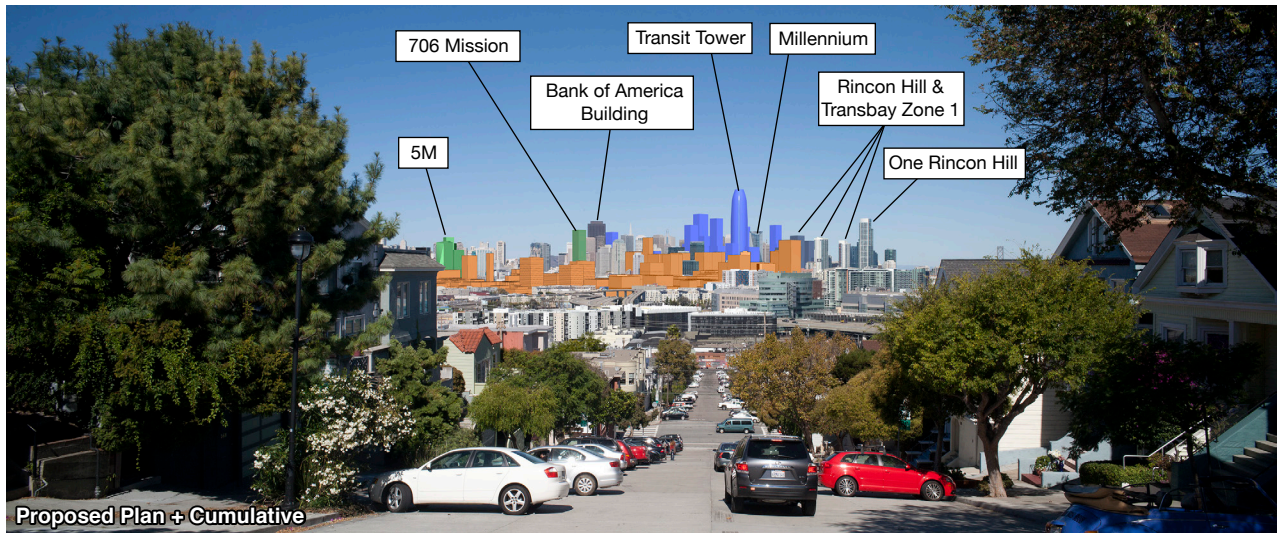
### **Views from within the Plan Area**

As stated above, the Plan Area lacks substantial topographic relief; the highest point rises to +50 feet SFD at the incline at Rincon Hill. Therefore, there is not a bluff or other substantially higher elevation within the Plan Area from which a scenic vista is available. Long-range public views along north/south-oriented streets are unavailable due to the area's relatively flat topography, overhead freeway and ramps, and shifts in the street grid at the northern and southern edges that diminish visibility into the neighboring areas, particularly when viewed at the street level. Views along east/west-oriented streets are available, although they are similarly limited by the flat topography. Prominent landforms to the east are minimally visible in the distance from most east/west streets in the Plan Area. Long-range views east primarily from Harrison Street include the natural and built areas of Diamond Heights and Twin Peaks. Views within the Plan Area are otherwise limited to shorter-range views, generally considered to be views within a quarter-mile, such as streetscapes, building architectural elements, and intermittent street-level views into the alleyways. **Figure IV.B-20** through **Figure IV.B-23**, present a representative sample of view corridors and built form within the Plan Area. Given the most dramatic changes in built form would occur in the southern portion of the Plan Area, photographs from these locations were chosen for their representative views.




Plan Building



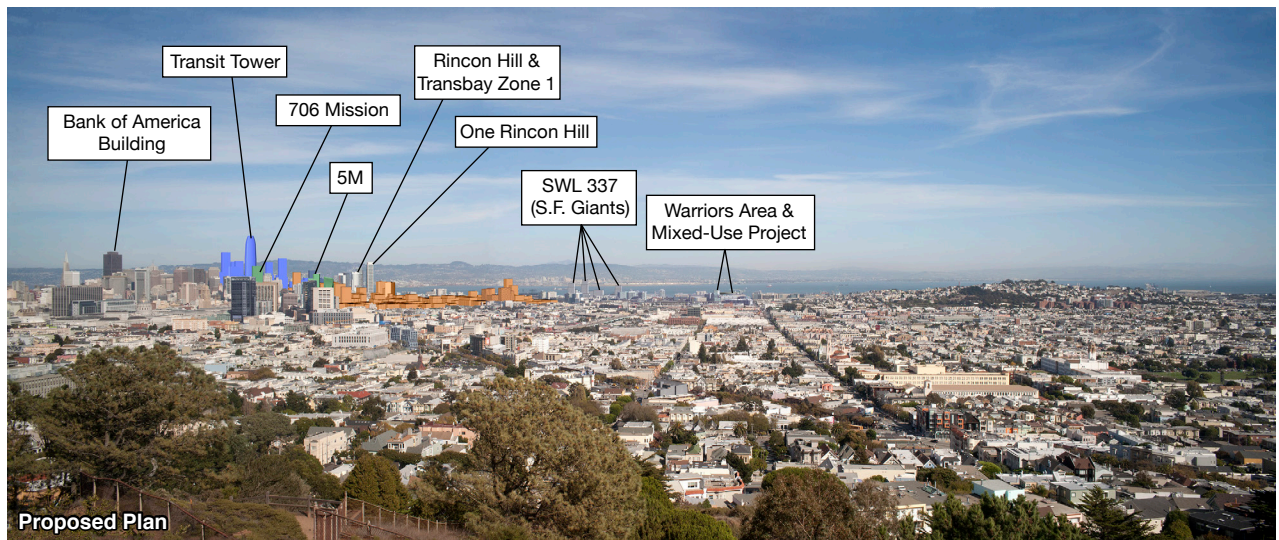
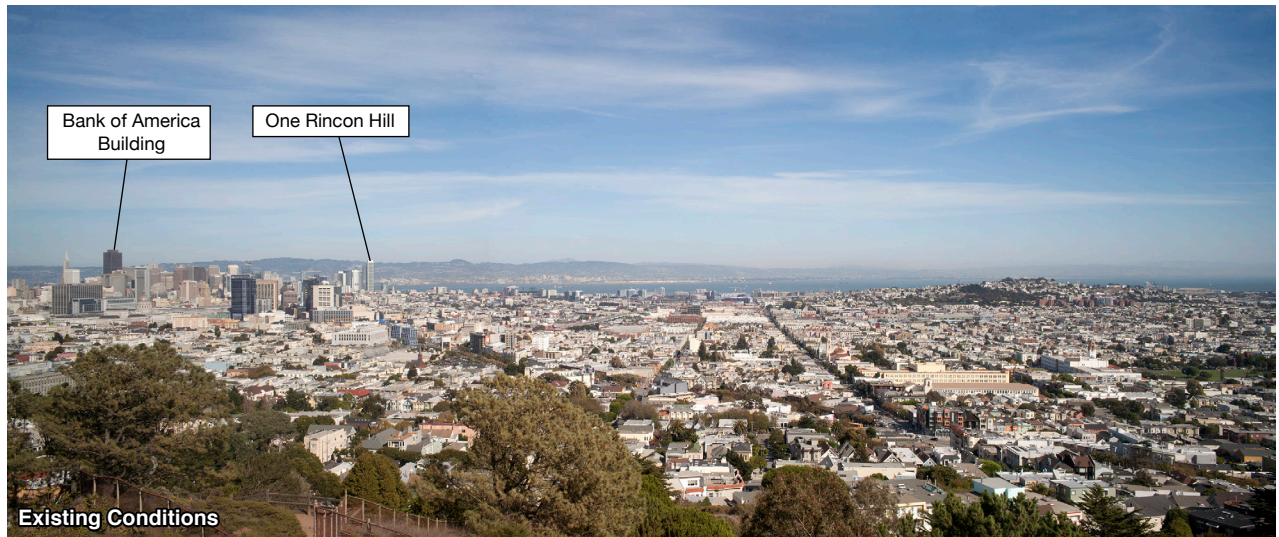


- Plan Building
- Transit Center District Plan
- Rincon Hill/Transbay Zone 1
- Other Cumulative Development



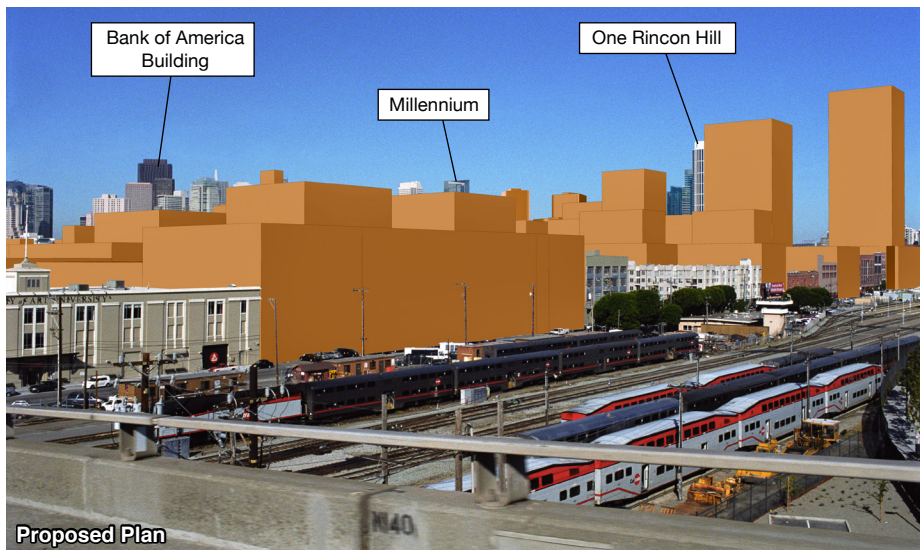
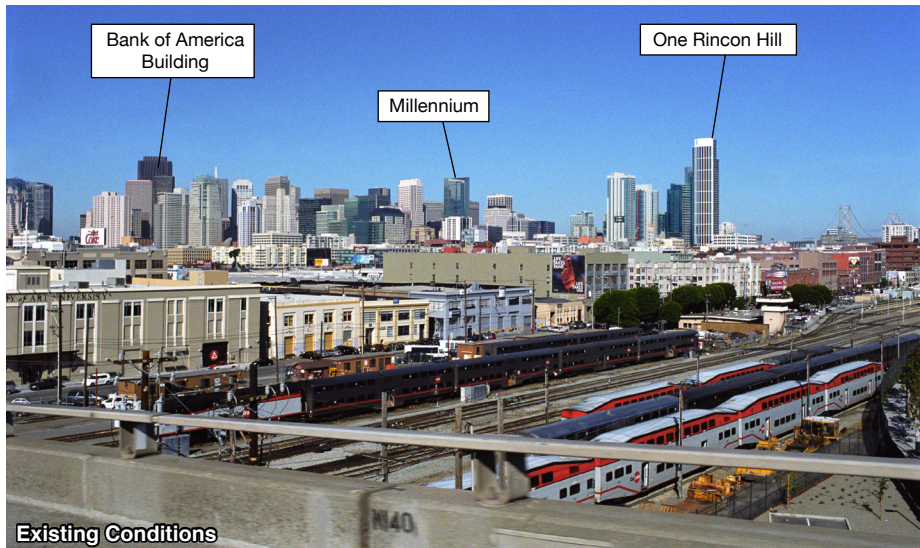
 Plan Building



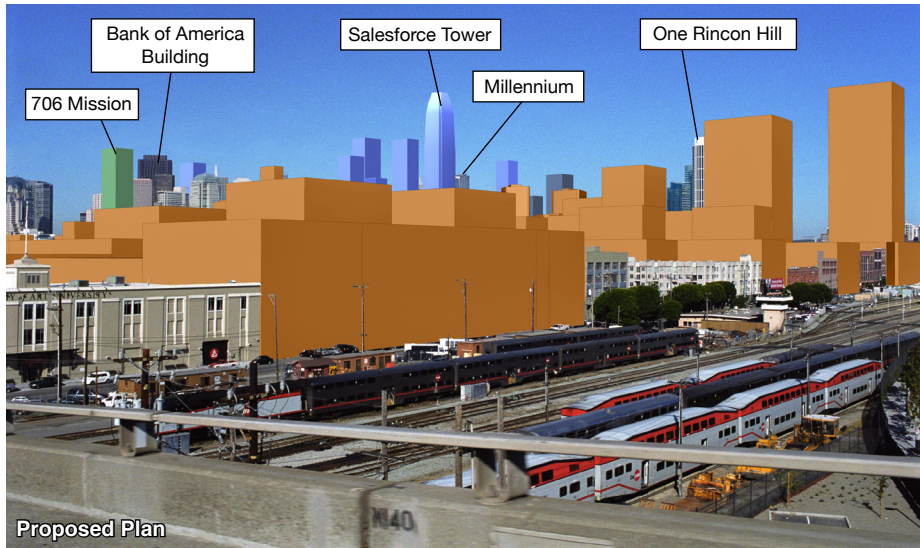
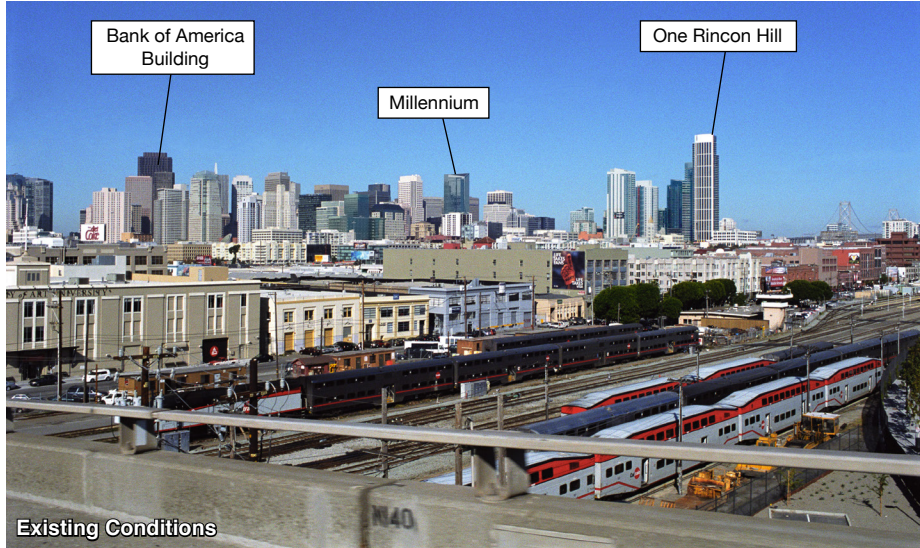


Plan Building
  Transit Center District Plan
  Rincon Hill/Transbay Zone 1
  Other Cumulative Development





Plan Building



■ Plan Building    
 ■ Transit Center District Plan    
 ■ Rincon Hill/Transbay Zone 1    
 ■ Other Cumulative Development

**Figure IV.B-18**  
 Mid-Range Visual Simulation: Interstate 280 Sixth Street Off-Ramp:  
 Existing Conditions Plus Plan and Cumulative





■ Plan Building



The view corridor westward along Brannan Street at Sixth Street (**Figure IV.B-20, Short-Range Visual Simulation: Brannan Street and Sixth Street: Existing Conditions Plus Plan**) includes the East Bay Hills in the distance; the low- and mid-rise buildings of the southern portion of the Plan Area frame the view. The distinctive glass panel façade of the One Rincon Hill building is visible in the distance to the northeast. The remainder of the view is of the wide Bryant Street, street trees, and lighting and electric poles.

Other views in the southern portion of the Plan Area also exemplify the mix of low-rise uses and building types that are present. The view north along Fourth Street at Townsend Street (**Figure IV.B-21, Short-Range Visual Simulation: Fourth Street and Townsend Street: Existing Conditions Plus Plan**) shows the low-rise, warehouse character of the southern portion of the Plan Area in the foreground. In the mid-range view is a mix of building types, as well as the I-80 elevated freeway. In the distance, the high-rise Intercontinental, Hilton, Westin St. Francis, Hotel Nikko, and Parc 55 Wyndham hotels are visible. The view from South Park Street at Third Street (**Figure IV.B-22, Short-Range Visual Simulation: Third Street and South Park Street: Existing Conditions Plus Plan**) illustrates the range of uses in the immediate area, including residential, gas station, and light industrial uses in a mix of building types. Long-range views are not available from South Park because of intervening buildings ringing the park and relatively flat topography.

The view looking southward on Fifth Street at Bryant Street (**Figure IV.B-23, Short-Range Visual Simulation: Bryant Street at Fifth Street: Existing Conditions Plus Plan**) is of low-rise (two- to three-story) warehouse buildings and the I-80 freeway entrance ramp in the shorter- and mid-range views, and includes a range of façade types and colors. The wide major streets and intersections are evident.

### *Light and Glare*

Sources of light and glare around the Plan Area are generally limited to the interior and exterior lights of buildings and lighting visible through windows, parking lots, and city streets, as well as from the elevated I-80 freeway and off-ramps. These sources of light are typical of those in a developed urban area. In addition, cars and trucks traveling to, from, and within the Plan Area represent a source of glare.

## **IV.B.3 Impacts and Mitigation Measures**

### **Significance Criteria**

For purposes of this EIR, implementation of the Plan, including proposed open spaces and street network changes would have a significant effect on visual quality if it would:

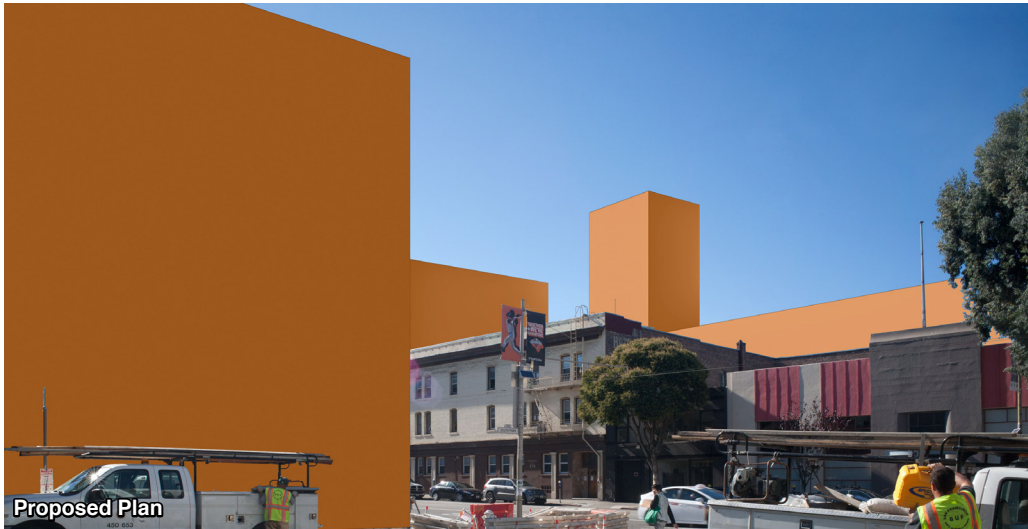
- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and other features of the built or natural environment which contribute to a scenic public setting;
- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; or
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.



Plan Building







Plan Building



Plan Building

## Approach to Analysis

The Plan is a regulatory program and would result in new planning policies and controls for land use to accommodate additional jobs and housing. Although the Plan would establish a policy and regulatory framework that, if carried out, could alter the urban form of the Plan Area, the Plan itself would not result in direct physical changes to its existing visual character. Any changes in urban form and visual quality would be the result of subsequent individual development projects allowed under the Plan. Street network changes and open space improvements could also have physical effects.

In general, visual quality is subjective and the degree of change perceived by observers varies. For example, some observers could be more keenly aware of any increase in building height or overall density, and these observers could find these changes substantially disruptive. On the other hand, it is likely that some observers would not consider the changes to the visual setting to be substantial, while still others would see a benefit in certain alterations of the built environment (such as the streetscape improvements proposed as part of the Plan, for instance). The significance determination is based on consideration of the extent of change related to visibility from key public vantage points, as well as the degree of visual contrast and compatibility in scale and character between the project and the existing surroundings, and the sensitivity of the affected view.

The analysis of the Plan's effect on the Plan Area's visual character or quality focuses on how the existing aesthetic quality in the area could change based on proposed changes to maximum building heights and allowed land uses, as well as design elements proposed in the Plan. The analysis considers the Plan's proposed neighborhood design objectives and policies, particularly with regard to Goal VIII, Ensure that New Buildings Enhance the Character of the Neighborhood and City, which would guide building massing, articulation, height, and ground-floor treatment. The analysis also considers the Plan's proposed improvements to the public realm, including street network changes and open space improvements, as described in Chapter II, Project Description.

The analysis evaluates the anticipated development in the Plan Area, as compared to existing conditions. Specifically, the analysis considers the degree of visual contrast and compatibility in scale and character between existing development and the future development that is likely to occur as a result of the proposed rezoning. The analysis of the Plan's effects on views considers the development anticipated throughout the Plan Area in relation to topography, siting and separation, and the Plan's proposed requirements concerning height, bulk, and sculpting, and whether or not changes to visual quality or views attributable to the plan would be substantial, demonstrative, and adverse. Concurrently, the discussion of views also includes an analysis of changes to San Francisco's urban form, specifically in the context of changes to the SoMa skyline. Discussion of potential changes to public views is accompanied by a series of visual simulations created from photographs taken from several viewpoints. The streetscape improvements, street network changes, and public realm improvements are not included in the visual simulations, but are evaluated in this EIR based on descriptions included in Chapter II, Project Description.



## Impact Evaluation

**Impact AE-1: Development under the Plan, including the proposed open space improvements and street network changes, would not substantially degrade the visual character or quality of the Plan Area or substantially damage scenic resources. (Less than Significant)**

### *Development under the Plan*

Physical changes are likely to occur as a secondary effect from the revisions to the *Planning Code* use and height and bulk districts throughout the Plan Area. Visual effects of new uses that may be foreseeable under the Plan would be most prevalent in areas where the Plan would allow for construction of taller buildings compared to existing conditions. As shown in Figure II-7, Proposed Plan Area Height and Bulk Districts, in Chapter II, Project Description, the Plan would allow increased height limits along much of Fourth Street south of Harrison Street and Harrison Street east of Fourth Street. In addition, increased height limits would also be allowed in the area bounded by Bryant Street to the north, Fourth Street to the east, Townsend Street to the south, and Sixth Street to the west from 85 feet (or lower) to up to 160 feet. The Plan would also allow for towers between 200 and 400 feet in height on certain sites south of Bryant Street, including three towers of between about 220 and 270 feet in height on the site of the existing San Francisco Flower Mart, as well as a 200-foot-tall building located on the northeast corner of Brannan and Bluxome Streets, a 250-foot-tall tower on the northwest corner of Bluxome and Fourth Streets, a 400-foot-tall tower located on the northeast corner of Townsend and Fourth Streets, another 200-foot-tall tower located on the northeast corner of Brannan and Fourth Streets, and a 300-foot-tall tower located on the north side of Townsend Street between Fourth and Fifth Streets. The Plan would also allow for towers between 200 and 350 feet in height on the north and south sides of Harrison Street between Second and Third Streets, a tower of 200 feet in height on the northeast corner of Third and Harrison Streets, a 180-foot tower at the northwest corner of Fourth and Folsom Streets, and a 300-foot-tall tower on the southwest corner of Fifth and Howard Streets. Elsewhere in the Plan Area, most height limits would remain as under existing conditions, at 85 feet or less; as noted, some existing height limits of as little as 40 feet would be increased to as much as 85 feet.

Development pursuant to these height limits would result in substantially taller buildings than the existing low- to mid-rise buildings both west of and along Fourth Street and Fifth Street south of I-80, where the highest concentration of taller buildings would be allowed, as well as along Harrison Street and Bryant Street east of Fourth Street, parallel to and on both sides of the elevated freeway. Taller buildings would also be allowed, but to a much lesser extent, along Folsom Street between Fourth and Fifth Streets – notably, adjacent to and/or on the site of the Moscone Center Central Subway station, and along Brannan Street between Fourth and Fifth Streets. These clusters of taller buildings would represent a departure from the predominantly 50- to 85-foot scale of existing buildings in the southern portion of the Plan Area. However, they would be compatible with the taller buildings farther to the north, such as residential buildings along Clementina Street and new commercial office spaces on Folsom Street, as well as the taller residential buildings to the south in the Mission Bay neighborhood.

The relatively greater height and density of development now present in some locations north of the Plan area would be expanded along the Fourth, Fifth, Harrison, Brannan, and Townsend Street corridors. The final zoning recommendations for Plan implementation would include a set of guidelines for key development

sites, which would highlight the desired locations for open space, mid-block alleys, building massing, and other key factors. These controls would refine the bulk increases of taller buildings on these sites. For sites that are not subject to the guidelines for key development sites, the Plan, specifically Goal VIII, includes a number of implementation measures to modulate the bulk of new buildings.

As described in Chapter II, Project Description, the Plan would seek to retain the character of the mid-rise district, limiting the presence of high-rises to areas near transit stations. Therefore, other height-limit increases would be relatively modest. For example, along Brannan Street between Fifth and Sixth Streets, the maximum height would increase between five and 30 feet. The portion of the Plan Area along the eastern edge of Sixth Street and the entire blocks between Fifth and Sixth Streets north of Bryant Street, would retain their existing height and bulk districts, as would the blocks bounded by Folsom Street to the north, Fourth Street to the east, Harrison Street to the south, and Fifth Street to the west. The block north of Folsom Street between Fourth and Fifth Streets also would retain its existing height and bulk districts, as would blocks in the southeast portions of the Plan Area bounded by Bryant Street to the north, Second Street to the east, Townsend Street to the south, and Third Street to the west, including the blocks immediately west of Third Street. The retention of these bulk and height districts, as well as only minor modifications to other height and bulk districts in the Plan Area, would encourage the preservation of the low- to mid-rise character of large portions of Central SoMa.

The development of individual projects likely to occur under the Plan would also result in the removal of some visual elements with neutral or low aesthetic value, including surface parking lots, and their replacement with new structures. These underutilized parcels would be replaced by the low-, mid-, and high-rise buildings allowed as described above.

Physical changes are expected to be incremental and occur gradually over time, as individual project sponsors find opportunities and financing to implement their projects. Given historical development patterns, it can also be assumed that not all parcels would be built to maximum height and bulk limits. The height limits proposed by the Plan would provide a greater incentive than the existing limits for redevelopment of certain specific corridors and areas. As a result, some new buildings could be noticeably taller than the adjacent remaining structures that are not redeveloped. However, while the character of the Plan Area would be altered, it would not necessarily be detrimental in terms of visual quality for the reasons discussed below.

Although the diverse scale and mid-rise character of much of the Plan Area would be retained, implementation of the Plan would result in changes both to the cityscape and on ground level. Taller buildings in specific clusters would reinforce the existing street grid-oriented development patterns and the locations of transit, but would concentrate visual changes at specific locations. At the ground level, there would be a perceptible change in both pedestrian and vehicular activity, owing to the introduction of higher-density development. However, while these changes would be noticeable, they would not necessarily be considered adverse. Visual changes would expand southward and intensify the existing pattern of mid-rise development that is present north of the freeway in Central SoMa and south of the Plan Area in Mission Bay North. As with the areas north of the freeway, the expanded mid-rise pattern south of the freeway would be interspersed with even taller buildings. Thus, while the overall appearance of the Plan Area would change as a result of the proposed Plan, the overall visual character as a densely developed urban area would be generally consistent with existing conditions. Moreover, the consistent pattern of development adjacent to I-80 would reduce the visual prominence of the elevated freeway viaduct.

Less visual change would occur north of the freeway where building height limits would generally be maintained at existing allowable limits. Historic preservation policies would continue to protect the older building stock that predominates along some streets. As such, with the exception of the Plan's proposed street network changes and despite any new development that may occur in these areas in the future, the existing visual character of the northern portion of the Plan Area would largely remain unchanged by the Plan.

While the Plan would result in aesthetic changes within the Plan Area due to the construction of new buildings and an overall intensification of urban uses, simulated in Figure IV.B-13 through Figure IV.B-23, under Impact AE-2, below, such changes would not necessarily be considered adverse. Future uses and building designs would be developed pursuant to the *General Plan* and a set of urban design controls and guidelines proposed by the Plan as discussed in Chapter II, Project Description. Over time, adherence to these design controls and guidelines would be expected to result in new development that is generally compatible with the existing development. However, the mix of building styles and uses across the Plan Area would be preserved. At the same time, the development of underutilized parcels and surface parking lots could enhance the visual quality of their immediate areas by replacing low use areas with active uses.

In terms of visual and scenic resources, the Plan calls for intensification of development and uses in the Plan area, and introduction of additional office spaces and housing within the existing street grid. No natural scenic resources would be affected as none exist in the Plan Area, and existing scenic resources identified in the Environmental Setting section above would not be directly affected. Accordingly, the Plan would result in less-than-significant impacts on scenic resources.

Although visual quality is subjective, based on the foregoing, the implementation of the Plan would not result in a substantial, demonstrable negative aesthetic effect on the existing visual character or quality of the area and its surroundings, nor would the Plan result in substantial adverse impacts on visual or scenic resources.

### **Proposed Street Network Changes**

As stated in Chapter II, Project Description, implementation of the Plan would include upgrades to sidewalks to meet the standards in the *Better Streets Plan*, provision of corner sidewalk extensions, and addition of street trees and furnishings. In addition, implementation of the Plan would amend the *Planning Code* to require that new construction on Fourth Street south of Harrison Street provide for a five-foot setback from the property line that would allow for further increases in sidewalk widths adjacent to new construction.

Other proposed changes to the striping and geometry of public rights-of-way, such as installation of mid-block crosswalks, installation of crosswalks at legs of major street intersections where none currently exist, restriping to meet minimum crosswalk widths, and installation of dedicated transit lanes would ease convenience of walking, cycling, and traveling via public transit. These modifications to the street network would result in minor and generally beneficial changes to the visual character of the Plan Area. Specifically, they would reduce the amount of public space allocated to private automobiles, add street trees to soften and shade sidewalks, and result in smaller-scale, more pedestrian-focused streets that have greater visual interest at the street level. These changes would not be considered adverse, and they would not affect scenic resources.



## Proposed Open Space Improvements

The Plan calls for expanded and new open spaces, as shown in Figure II-14, Parks and Recreational Opportunities, of the Project Description. These improvements would include a new park between Fourth, Fifth, Bryant and Brannan Streets, and a new linear open space on a portion of the right-of-way on Bluxome Street between Fourth and Fifth Streets.

The Plan also calls for single-surface shared streets along Welsh Street and Freelon Street west of Fourth Street and Shipley Street between Fourth and Fifth Streets.<sup>78</sup> In addition, as indicated in Chapter II, Project Description, the Plan would reduce the scale of large blocks. This would be accomplished by extending the provisions of Section 270.2 of the *Planning Code* to the entire Plan Area, requiring new publicly-accessible mid-block rights-of-way and access easements on large lots with more than 200 feet of street frontage.

These new and expanded open spaces would soften the urbanized character of Plan Area. The built rectilinear forms and asphalt streets would be interrupted by areas of landscaping, distinct paving, and passive recreational features. These types of street treatments have been considered based on the types of streets they would serve and specific design details that are the result of local street geometries and functionality. These modifications to the area's visual character would not be adverse and would not affect scenic resources.

## Summary

In summary, implementation of the Plan, including subsequent development projects and construction of the proposed street network changes and open space improvements, would not adversely affect the visual character or scenic resources of the Plan Area. The impact would be *less than significant*.

**Mitigation:** None required.

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**Impact AE-2: Development under the Plan, including the proposed open space improvements and street network changes, would alter public views of the Plan Area from short-, mid-, and long-range vantage points and alter views into the surrounding neighborhoods from within the Plan Area, but would not adversely affect public views or have a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas. (Less than Significant)**

As stated above, the Plan Area lacks substantial topographic relief; therefore, there is not a bluff or other substantially higher elevation within the Plan Area from which a scenic vista is available. Accordingly, this discussion analyzes the effect of development under the Plan and its effect on short- and mid-range views within the Plan Area, as well as long-range views from outside the Plan Area. Open space improvements and street network changes developed pursuant to the Plan would not result in substantial changes to existing views. This analysis therefore focuses on the effects on views that may be altered by subsequent development projects.

As noted under Impact AE-1, changes in building mass and bulk would be focused in the southern half of the Plan Area, as well as near transit stations along Fourth Street. New, taller buildings would be allowed in these

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<sup>78</sup> Shared streets are defined as streets that accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists, as well as motor vehicles, in a single right-of-way.

areas. Such physical changes would be implemented as a result of the revisions to the zoning and height and bulk districts. In modifying the controls on the vacant and underutilized parcels, the Plan would allow greater development that would affect the built form of some of the Plan Area, extending the mid-rise character north of the Plan Area farther south. The Plan would also facilitate development of underutilized lots, including surface parking lots, and their replacement with new, taller structures.

Physical changes to urban form would be expected to be incremental and occur gradually over time, as individual project sponsors find opportunities and financing to implement their projects. It is also the case that parcels within the Plan Area are not built to maximum height and bulk limits and many likely would not be demolished and redeveloped to the maximum allowed heights. As a result, some new buildings could be noticeably taller than the adjacent remaining structures that are not redeveloped. Views of the Plan Area would be altered, although the change would not be adverse for the reasons discussed below.

The greatest changes to view corridors would occur in the southern half of the Plan Area, as well as near transit stations along Fourth Street, where height limits would increase the most. In particular, as noted above, the Plan would allow for approximately eight towers of between 200 and 400 feet in height on certain sites south of Bryant Street. The Plan would also allow for six towers between 200 and 350 feet in height on the north and south sides of Harrison Street between Second and Third Streets, a tower of 200 feet in height on the northeast corner of Third and Harrison Streets, a 180-foot tower at the northwest corner of Fourth and Folsom Streets, and a 300-foot-tall tower on the southwest corner of Fifth and Howard Streets. However, elsewhere in the Plan Area, most height limits would remain as under existing conditions, at 85 feet or less, with some existing height limits of as little as 40 feet allowed to increase to only as much as 85 feet. View corridors across vacant or underutilized parcels would be affected by this allowable increase in height in some portions of the Plan Area. In addition, the fairly “open” feeling that is currently conveyed at the ground level at major intersections and along some streets would be affected by the development of projects pursuant to the Plan, thereby narrowing or obstructing existing view corridors. It should be noted that in many areas, these more open views are dominated by broad expanses of pavement on major streets that carry heavy vehicle traffic. New, taller development would be limited around existing open spaces, including South Park and the Alice Street Community Gardens. Therefore, the relative “open” feeling of these areas would remain as under existing conditions.

Figure IV.B-12 presents a visual simulations location map. Figure IV.B-13 through Figure IV.B-23, present views of Central SoMa from locations distant from, near, and within the Plan Area, as well as visual simulations of the built form envisioned by the Plan. The built forms of the Central SoMa Plan are shown in orange. It should be noted that the visual simulations do not take into account detailed bulk sculpting measures that would be required under the Plan, which are articulated in Goal VIII, Objective 8.3, “Reinforce the Character of Central SoMa as a Mid-Rise District with Tangible ‘Urban Rooms’.” Therefore, the visual simulations of development that could occur under the Plan depict a worst-case scenario.

In long-range views, from the Potrero Hill neighborhood (at Texas Street and 19th Street), as well as from Corona Heights Park, Figure IV.B-13/Figure IV.B-14 and Figure IV.B-15/Figure IV.B-16, respectively, the change attributable to the Plan would be views of the upper stories of new development, with mid-rise buildings extending southward from the existing high-rise buildings Downtown, as well as northward from Mission Bay. Relatively small portions of new low-rise buildings would be visible, and would be generally visually subsumed within the surrounding existing development. The new mid-rise buildings would present a

more densely built visual character. However, these buildings would not detract from views of the Downtown skyline, which taken together create a unique and distinctive backdrop, where all of the more prominent high-rises would continue to be visible. New construction would not adversely affect views of the East Bay Hills, which would remain mostly unchanged. The tallest new vertical elements (at parcels on Fourth Street at Townsend Street, Fourth Street at Brannan Street, and Harrison Street at Third Street) would partially obscure views of the Bay from Corona Heights Park, but not to a large extent.

Development pursuant to the Plan would occur gradually over time, but would have a much more substantial effect on mid-range views, specifically from those immediately outside the Plan Area. Approaching the Plan Area along I-280 (Figure IV.B-17/Figure IV.B-18), the new mid- and high-rise buildings would obscure dynamic (moving) views of the existing low-rise development in the neighborhood, especially given the concentration of anticipated new development along Fourth Street and in the southwestern portion of the Plan Area, as well as views of most of the existing buildings in the Financial District. Approaching from the east along I-80 from the Bay Bridge (Figure IV.B-19), the new development would be visible above the roadway deck, and in some locations would partially block views of the natural and built environment of the Twin Peaks and Diamond Heights neighborhoods. These dynamic views, including interruptions of existing views, would typically be observed very briefly by viewers in vehicles travelling at freeway speeds. The view would be of a more heavily and densely urbanized area, adjacent to the high-rises of Downtown and Rincon Hill.

The Plan would also change short-range views. Views along Brannan Street, Bryant Street, and Townsend Street, as well as numbered streets in the southern portion of the Plan Area, would be of taller built forms with more bulk than under existing conditions, particularly where surface parking lots or other underutilized spaces currently exist and would presumably be replaced by buildings at maximum allowable height and bulk (see Figure IV.B-20 through Figure IV.B-23). View corridors would be interrupted by new building masses, obscuring views of the sky and (when looking northward) buildings downtown. Views would be of a mixed-height neighborhood, with several mid-rise buildings. All development is expected to occur within existing lot lines, so that view corridors along the center of streets would remain. As stated above, the building massings depicted in the visual simulations would be subject to bulk sculpting measures that would be required under the Plan. However, as shown in the visual simulations, views from sidewalks would be partially obscured. The overall views of the Plan Area would continue to be of densely developed urban landscapes.

In summary, long- and mid-range views would be affected by development pursuant to the Plan. Taller buildings would alter or partially obscure long-range views of the Bay, the topography of the city and region, and Downtown buildings, but not to the extent that any view would be substantially impaired. In short-range views, the “open” feeling that currently exists within the Plan Area would be reduced by the new built fabric. The sky would continue to be visible, however, above and directly along each street, as it is in other mid-rise neighborhoods in the city. For the reasons discussed above, development pursuant to the Plan would have a *less-than-significant* impact on views and scenic vistas.

**Mitigation:** None required.

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**Impact AE-3: Development under the Plan, including the proposed open space improvements and street network changes, would not create a new source of substantial light or glare in the Plan Area that would adversely affect day or nighttime views or substantially impact other people or properties. (Less than Significant)**

Implementation of the proposed Plan would generate additional night lighting in the future, but the change is not anticipated to be substantial or adverse in the context of the existing lighting conditions in the Central SoMa neighborhood. New lighting would not be in excess of that currently emitted by existing buildings, and could be expected to be incrementally reduced, on a per-building basis, with the requirements in the *San Francisco Building Code* and *Green Building Code* for energy conservation. Compliance with design guidelines and the *Planning Code* would also require the use of non-reflective glass, downward-directed and shielded outdoor lighting, and controlled illumination of outdoor signage. Therefore, implementation of the Plan would not result in obtrusive light or glare that would adversely affect views or substantially affect other properties. (A separate analysis of lighting effects on birds is presented in Appendix B, Initial Study, Section D.13, Biological Resources, p. B-124.)

Planning Commission Resolution 9212 generally prohibits the use of mirrored or reflective glass in new buildings. Therefore, impacts related to glare of new development would not be substantial. Street network changes and open spaces improvements would result in glare and lighting conditions similar to existing conditions.

Based on the above, impacts of the proposed Plan on light and glare would be *less than significant*.

**Mitigation:** None required.

## IV.B.4 Cumulative Impacts

**Impact C-AE-1: Development under the Plan, including the proposed street network changes and open space improvements, in combination with past, present and reasonably foreseeable future projects, would alter the visual character and public views of and through SoMa, but would not adversely affect visual character, scenic vistas, or scenic resources or substantially increase light and glare. (Less than Significant)**

### Development under the Plan

The projects that are included in the cumulative scenario for purposes of visual quality analysis include: the Transit Center District Plan, buildings proposed within Zone 1 of the Transbay Redevelopment Plan, buildings proposed under the Rincon Hill Plan, the Museum of Modern Art expansion (under construction), the residential tower at 706 Mission Street that will also house the Mexican Museum (approved), the expansion of Moscone Convention Center (approved), and the 5M project (approved). As shown in Figure IV.B-14 through Figure IV.B-23, these approved, reasonably foreseeable future cumulative projects are shown in blue (Transit Center District Plan) and gray (Rincon Hill and development within Zone 1 of the Transbay Redevelopment Plan, primarily along Folsom Street east of Second Street). Other planned or approved cumulative development projects (notably, the 5M and 706 Mission Street projects) are shown in green. Smaller projects within and near the Plan Area, even mid-rise developments, would not generally be discernible in long-range views of the Plan Area, nor in shorter-range views from within the Plan Area (unless

a project were immediately in the field of view). Accordingly, such smaller projects would not combine with Plan Area development and the larger cumulative projects discussed here to result in significant cumulative impacts.

When combined with other foreseeable projects proposed or under construction nearby, the Central SoMa Plan would alter the visual character of the northeast portion of the city, although in the context of the already-developed Plan Area, the change would not be considered adverse. For example, in the Transit Center District Plan to the east of the Plan Area, buildings up to 1,070 feet in height are allowed and are under construction. The proposed Plan, combined with the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future development nearby, would create more density in SoMa, with both more high-rise and more mid-rise buildings, and increased building height and density that is focused on locations near major transit hubs and other transit nodes. Implementation of this collection of projects and the subsequent development that could occur under these land use plans would intensify the overall look and feel of these areas. However, this visual change would not be substantially adverse.

In addition, underutilized and vacant parcels across all plan areas and cumulative projects would be developed, removing areas of lower-quality visual character.

For instance, as shown in Figure IV.B-14 and Figure IV.B-15, the proposed building heights within the Plan Area would foster a transition from the taller heights of existing conditions plus cumulative projects in the areas north of the Plan Area, including Downtown, to the more mid-rise visual character of Central SoMa, and then to the more low-rise character of areas south of Central SoMa, such as Mission Bay and Dogpatch. Therefore, the overall increases in height and bulk of cumulative development would change the visual character of greater SoMa, but not in an adverse manner.

As with the Plan, cumulative development would not substantially disrupt the existing natural or built environment. Accordingly, cumulative impacts on scenic resources would be less than significant.

Regarding views from distant locations, the Plan, combined with cumulative development, would alter views of the Bay and East Bay Hills, but also would create new visual focal points. The new towers that would be constructed under the Transit Center District Plan and Rincon Hill Plan would obscure such views to a greater degree. However, urban design controls applicable to development would encourage slender towers by requiring minimum tower separation distances and square footage reductions in the towers' upper levels.<sup>79</sup> Overall, the cumulative impact to views would not be adverse to a level that would be considered significant. The Plan's focus on mid-rise development would preserve existing views of the East Bay Hills and Downtown skyline, and would mostly preserve views of the Bay. As shown in Figure IV.B-15/Figure IV.B-16, construction of new buildings under the Central SoMa Plan would not contribute considerably to blocked views of the East Bay Hills and, therefore, the Plan, in combination with past, present and reasonably foreseeable future projects, would not result in a cumulative impact on distant scenic views.

Cumulative impacts in the dynamic (moving) views from locations along I-280 and I-80 (Figure IV.B-17/ Figure IV.B-18 and Figure IV.B-19) would be similar to those of the Plan, in that the new buildings in the Plan Area would partially obscure views of cumulative developments nearby and the Downtown skyline, as well as

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<sup>79</sup> *Planning Code*, Section 270.

of the Twin Peaks and Diamond Heights neighborhoods. However, the upper floors of newer, taller cumulative developments would continue to be visible, and as noted above, these changes would be minor and would not adversely affect views to a level that would be considered significant. As shown in Figure IV.B-17/Figure IV.B-18 and Figure IV.B-19, past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future developments would not combine with the Central SoMa Plan to adversely affect these views. As such, the cumulative effect would not result in an adverse change.

As described above, implementation of the Plan would not result in obtrusive light or glare that would adversely affect views or substantially affect other properties. Cumulative developments would be subject to the same mirrored and reflective glass controls in Planning Commission Resolution 9212 as development under the Plan, and the requirements for energy conservation, as well as design guidelines and *Planning Code* compliance, would be expected to reduce night-lighting impacts of new development as compared to past practices. Cumulative light and glare impacts would not be adverse.

## Proposed Street Network Changes and Proposed Open Space Improvements

Implementation of the Plan's proposed street network changes and open space improvements, combined with reasonably foreseeable projects, would likely result in a softened streetscape in the northeastern portion of the city, with additional public open spaces, shared streets, and street trees, as well as reduction in the amount of space allocated to the private automobile. These changes in visual character would create smaller-scale, more pedestrian-focused streets and would generally be beneficial. Such changes would not be adverse, and cumulative impacts to visual character would be less than significant. Street network changes and open space improvements in combination with reasonably foreseeable projects would not substantially affect existing scenic resources, views, scenic vistas, or light and glare.

## Summary

The Plan, combined with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects, would alter the visual character of portions of the city, but not in an adverse manner, nor would these projects combine to adversely affect scenic resources. The Central SoMa Plan also would not combine with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects to create a significant cumulative impact in long-range views of the Bay, East Bay Hills, or Downtown, and cumulative development would not combine with development that could occur under the Central SoMa Plan to result in cumulative impacts to any other views or scenic vistas. Cumulative light and glare impacts would not be adverse. Therefore, cumulative impacts would be *less than significant*.

**Mitigation:** None required.



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