DE-GENTRIFYING THE STREETSCAPE:
Reclaiming Tactical Urbanism for San Francisco’s Tenderloin

by

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ABSTRACT

San Francisco’s Tenderloin neighborhood is often described in classic “skid row” terms as a neighborhood characterized by crime, prostitution, drugs, homelessness, seedy hotels, and rampant blight. It is described as ‘hopeless’ and ‘lost’, and a place to be avoided at all costs. In reality, the Tenderloin is a more complex neighborhood than a simple skid row definition allows, with a rich fabric of social dynamics, built form, local heroes, and powerful villains. While the historic culture bearers of other San Francisco neighborhoods have been gradually pushed out by younger, richer, tech-affiliated residents with little understanding of the historical context they have settled in, the Tenderloin has managed to retain its intrinsic grit, codify its historic artifacts, and ward off attempts to soften or commodify its rough edges through gentrification.

Given the rapid rate at which income inequality and low-income displacement is transforming the social conditions and power dynamics within neighborhoods throughout San Francisco, this thesis uses the Tenderloin as a living laboratory for answering the flowing questions: To what extent has the Tenderloin resisted the forces of gentrification that have meanwhile infiltrated bordering neighborhoods such as Union Square and Mid-Market? What are the physical and social design qualities of the Tenderloin neighborhood that have allowed it to resist wholesale changes to its function as a provider of affordable housing and shelter for San Francisco’s most marginalized and vulnerable populations? To what extent does the urban form of the Tenderloin allow for continued resistance of gentrification, and what role(s) does it allow for planners and designers to assist in curating this continued resistance?

This thesis begins with a field study of the neighborhood’s public realm, undertaken in January and March of 2017. The resulting observations and conversations with public realm users served as the primary data source for the research, along with secondary data sources on the Tenderloin’s development history from its reconstruction after the 1906 earthquake to the present. From these findings, this thesis concludes with a series of public realm design recommendations for preserving the Tenderloin as a sustainer of low-income people and as a shelter for those beyond the scope of the tech industry’s viewfinder.
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INTRODUCING THE TENDERLOIN: SAN FRANCISCO’S LAST HONEST NEIGHBORHOOD?

NEIGHBORHOOD OVERVIEW

San Francisco’s Tenderloin neighborhood is often described in classic “skid row” terms as a neighborhood characterized by crime, prostitution, drugs, homelessness, seedy hotels, and rampant blight. It is described as ‘hopeless’ and ‘lost’, and a place to be avoided at all costs. In reality, while the Tenderloin certainly exhibits some of these qualities, it is a more complex neighborhood than a simple skid row definition allows with a rich fabric of social dynamics, built form, local heroes, and powerful villains. It is a neighborhood that shows both signs of relative permanence and more recent change, with historic buildings that date back to the years immediately following the 1906 earthquake and also a “coding” academy. The footprints of the Gay Rights Movement line its streets, as do the footprints of mid-century jazz legends, rock and roll hall of famers, and boxing greats. In 2017, the Tenderloin is also perhaps the last ‘genuine’ neighborhood in San Francisco, having never found great success in pretending to be anything other than a source of shelter for the working-class, poor, immigrant, homeless, drug addicted, mentally ill, queer youth, and other vulnerable populations. While the artists, people of color, and other historic culture bearers of such San Francisco neighborhoods as the Mission, Western Addition, and the Fillmore District have been gradually pushed out by younger, whiter, richer residents with little understanding of the historical context they have settled in, the Tenderloin has managed to retain its intrinsic grit, codify its historic artifacts, and ward off attempts to soften or commodify its rough edges through gentrification—despite the attempts of nearly every mayor in San Francisco history. With its mural covered walls and needle covered sidewalks, the Tenderloin is a neighborhood of irreconcilable contrasts, and confounding mysteries.
San Francisco Open Space and Road Network

The Study Area, Tenderloin, and Surrounding Neighborhoods
As San Francisco transforms into a city that runs on "tech", the Tenderloin continues to provide basic needs for those who have no defined role within this economy: the working-class poor and the homeless. The median income for one of the Tenderloin’s poorest census tracts was $11,925 in 2015, while a few blocks away in the South of Market neighborhood, the median income jumped to $127,080 (American Community Survey, 2015). This staggering level of income inequality within close proximity illustrates the extreme socioeconomic divides between the Tenderloin and its surroundings, despite being physically proximate.

Throughout its existence, the neighborhood has harbored a wide range of behaviors, lifestyles, ethnicities, and gender identities. In 2015, a majority of its 22,000 residents spoke languages other than English, and 47 percent were born outside of the United States. By comparison, the city-wide percentage of foreign-born residents was 35 percent (American Community Survey, 2015). The neighborhood also shelters an exceptionally high proportion of the city’s homeless population and people experiencing other kinds of traumatic, destabilizing periods in their lives that challenge comprehension. A city-wide homelessness survey conducted over a single night in January of 2015 indicated that the City’s 6th District, which includes the Tenderloin, Mid-Market, and South of Market (SoMa) neighborhoods, contained 58 percent of the city’s entire homeless population (Applied Survey Research, 2015). And yet despite these exceptionally high rates of transient occupants, the neighborhood exudes a tight-knit community-oriented character that oftentimes seem more typical of a small Midwestern town than a coastal inner-city. People look one another in the eye and nod their heads 'hello' as they pass on the sidewalk, and they gather together outside the lobbies of their buildings to take in the afternoon street scene and share gossip. In the morning, a single stretch of sidewalk simultaneously hosts families walking to school, strippers calling cheerfully to one another from down the block, and a man with a needle sticking out of his arm curled up against the side of a building. All of this is the Tenderloin, and while perhaps not exactly Jane Jacobs’ West Village as described in her seminal, The Death and Life of Great American Cities, the Tenderloin does indeed have a “street ballet” of its own [J. Jacobs, 1961].

The evolution of this street ballet, and the urban systems and forms that have served as its choreographers, is a direct result of a complicated history of economic and social forces dating back to the neighborhood’s earliest origins [T. Robinson, 1995]. Some of these forces were fiercely political, drawing the weight of mayors and other elected officials into the process. In other cases, government took a decidedly hands off approach to the neighborhood and allowed private developers, nonprofit institutions, and grassroots organizers to battle between themselves to shape the physical and social neighborhood landscape [Hartman, Carnochan, & Hartman, 2002]. While these interventions range from blunt policy directives to more temporal pilot projects, all have typically leveraged change for the Tenderloin as a result of major events or economic conditions occurring in the neighborhoods that surround it. This important distinction helps to define the larger role that the Tenderloin plays in San Francisco: as a neighborhood bordering other neighborhoods that have fallen into the crosshairs of
Introducing the Tenderloin

Thesis Study Area of Tenderloin Neighborhood and Surrounding Areas

[Map showing Tenderloin and Mid-Market areas with key landmarks and streets marked.]
Chapter 1

Historic elements add rich texture to the street scene.

Small homeless encampment in a Tenderloin alley.
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developers and elected officials.

Today, the Tenderloin’s most apparent counterpoint is the Mid-Market corridor. Born out of urban renewal projects of the mid-century, and the leftover spaces between them, Mid-Market illustrates what happens to places that a city regards as culturally insignificant and unavoidable collateral damage. The corridor includes the stretch of Market Street, the city’s main transit corridor, between Fifth Street and Van Ness Avenue. It is bordered on the north by the Tenderloin and Civic Center neighborhoods, on the south by the aptly named South of Market (SoMa) neighborhood, and on the east by the Union Square shopping district. It connects the central and western portions of the city to the Financial District and the Embarcadero waterfront, and was a lively entertainment district with theatres and dance halls in the first half of the 20th Century.

In 1967, construction for the Bay Area Rapid Transit system closed off sections of the street for years, which decimated its existing street life and made operations untenable for the ground floor retail and entertainment businesses that lined the street. For the next four decades, over the course of several economic booms and busts within San Francisco, the corridor stayed largely the same—resisting revitalization efforts despite a range of different attempts by politicians, policy makers, and developers, and breeding a culture of crime, drug use, homelessness, and other conditions of urban poverty and civic neglect. With easy access to multiple transit systems, a relatively low commercial occupancy rate, and a high number of boarded up ground floor units, the corridor attracted activities that flourish away from prying eyes and heavy foot traffic.

In 2011, a tax break incentivizing fast-growth tech companies to relocate in the neighborhood was approved by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. Six years since the Tax Break began, once vacant and graffitied storefronts now host gleaming urban commercial fortresses with high-end bistros, “chai bars”, and customized bicycle shops along their ground floors. During the weekday mornings, Market Street’s sidewalks are filled with over 10,000 new working professionals (Colin, 2017) walking briskly in jackets emblazoned with the names of their technology company—the adult versions of high school letterman jackets. Fleets of corporate shuttles pick up and drop off tech employees at existing public transit stops around the district; security guards stand at attention outside the entrances to newly renovated offices; and restaurants deliver catered lunches to workers high above the street. These privatized forms of traditionally public urban functions serve to limit the frequency of interactions between technology workers and existing Tenderloin and Mid-Market populations, and in some cases physically displace these populations altogether.

There are other more immediately visible impacts of the Tax Break as well. Blocks or segments of blocks with redeveloped office buildings and new market-rate residential units are power-washed in the early morning, though it takes several hours for the water to dry completely. As employees make their way along the sidewalks to work, crossing over from dry zones to wet, these water marks serve as visual cues for a new kind of power structure controlling the corridor and the defensive design techniques it operates. The effect is similar to one described by Mike Davis.
in downtown LA, where intentional design policies inflict maximum separation between the poor and the rich:

“When the itineraries of Downtown powerbrokers unavoidably intersect with the habitats of the homeless or the work poor... extraordinary design precautions are being taken to ensure the physical separation of the different humanities” (Davis, 2006).

The power-washed sidewalks are not the only visible example of how the tech economy has reclaimed the “public” realm along Market Street. Gleaming green bike lanes sparkle along the edges of the street, and new street trees and bicycle racks are scattered along the sidewalks. Brightly-colored café chairs placed outside new restaurants offer formal seating opportunities for office workers and tourists along a street that has for decades intentionally lacked public benches in an attempt to discourage the homeless or other low-income people from gathering. This re-programming of the public space to ensure that it is used to its highest potential by a new kind of user points to a larger debate about the future of public space in urban centers where innovation and creative economies flock. As companies look to cities to serve as sources of inspiration for their employees through organic encounters with other creative types, the public realm by default takes on the role of facilitator of these encounters. Thus, cities that offer more public spaces for organic and spontaneous collaboration beyond the office walls will attract more firms, and with more firms comes a need for more collaborative public spaces, and so on. Out of this potentially infinite chain of productive public realm escalations, “public” space is consistently postured as something that must provide a productive function for “private” interests in order for valued to be derived. We see examples of this phenomenon in the language used by livability advocates who argue that investments towards bicycle, pedestrian, and transit infrastructure will directly result in higher property values, retail sales, and a healthier and more productive workforce (Stehlin, 2015).
Introducing the Tenderloin

Tech employees leaving the office for the evening

Small homeless encampment in a Tenderloin alley
CURRENT NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING CONTEXT

Today, the Tenderloin sits at a critical juncture in its history. As a wave of redevelopment pushes against its Market Street boundaries, the neighborhood’s legacy as a provider of housing and services for low-income people appears tenuous. While current zoning mechanisms governing the neighborhood have largely prevented contemporary redevelopment, as well as widespread conversions of certain protected housing types to market-rate units, the rate at which gentrification is occurring throughout San Francisco has no precedent and presents new types of challenges for the Tenderloin (Bronstein, 2014). As such, a deeper analysis of how the urban forms of this neighborhood came to be and how they have historically resisted certain forces of change while facilitating others, is necessary for understanding the potential for these forms to sustain in the face of recent gentrification pressures.

In 2016, the Tenderloin contained the highest proportion of the City’s permanently affordable housing stock (28.5-percent), and more than double the number of affordable units as second-place, SoMa. This nearly 30-percent holding of all permanently affordable units in the city appears even more substantial when considering that the Tenderloin is a fairly small neighborhood by San Francisco standards. By comparison, other neighborhoods with higher numbers of affordable housing stock, such as SoMa, Western Addition, and the Mission are all larger than the Tenderloin.

While the Tenderloin currently serves as a stronghold of affordable housing supply for the city, there is limited research to-date exploring the potential for this status to change. Nor is there research outlining how the neighborhood has come to serve as the largest provider of affordable housing, and what elements of its built environment facilitated this ascension. Further, the Tenderloin exhibits a high density of a unique housing typology, the Single Room Occupancy (SRO) unit, that sets it apart from other neighborhoods [San Francisco Department of City Planning, 2016; San Francisco Department of Public Health, 2016]. As small studio apartments that typically lack private kitchens or bathrooms, the design of the unit inherently attracts a lower-income, single adult who is often experiencing a physical or mental health impairment [San Francisco Department of Public Health, 2016].

While current discourse on the implications of these types revolves around public health and building code considerations [San Francisco Department of Public Health, 2016], the demographic make-up of its residents and the physical scale of the unit itself compared to other residential unit types in the neighborhood present potential implications for the Tenderloin’s built environment that deserve further exploration.

The neighborhood also contains a larger number of social service providers that draw thousands of visitors through their doors each day for purposes that range from free shelter and meals, to medical care and legal services. As these critical services for the city’s most vulnerable populations are often performed by private nonprofit organizations, their long-term role in the Tenderloin is largely unknown in the face of adjacent gentrification pressures along Market Street and a city-wide housing affordability crisis [Bronstein, 2014]. Should market forces push these uses to cheaper and less centrally located areas of the city, the loss of the daily foot traffic they generated would likely have notable impacts on the neighborhood’s public realm environment.
With regard to this public realm environment, the visible signs of homelessness, open-air drug use and sale, and exhibitions of chronic mental health conditions on the Tenderloin’s sidewalks and streets are well documented (Applied Survey Research, 2015; Bronstein, 2014; Colin, 2017; Hardy, 2015). Yet these documented conditions do not account for other valuable cultural resources of the neighborhood that are less widely known, such as the Tenderloin’s abundance of artists (Brown, 2015), immigrants (San Francisco Department of City Planning, 2016), and historical building stock (Corbett & Bloomfield, 2008).

Finally, the Tenderloin presents a unique opportunity to study the life and character of an urban, Bay Area neighborhood that remarkably has no recent neighborhood-specific, unifying physical planning document guiding its development today. Meanwhile, a recent emergence of tactical urbanism, or the low-cost, shorter-term, scalable, grassroots approach to planning (Lydon, Garcia, & Duany, 2015), and smaller scale piloted interventions around the Tenderloin along Market Street and within Civic Center (Canellakis, Chasan, & Hoeprich, 2017; Hurst, 2012) suggest that the City is already looking to these types of interventions as drivers of neighborhood change. A limited presence of traditional neighborhood planning strategies coupled with the prevalence of tactical urbanism and piloting draws correlations to the theory of everyday urbanism, which contends that smaller forms of incremental change in ubiquitous, unremarkable portions of the city can also serve as essential drivers of change (Crawford & Speaks, 2005).
RESEARCH MOTIVATIONS AND QUESTIONS

While the planning context described in the previous section is what continued to drive my interest in studying the Tenderloin, my initial motivation for choosing the neighborhood as the topic of this thesis is a personal one. I moved to San Francisco in the summer of 2010, when the city was just beginning to show signs of emerging from the slump of the recession, and seemed to buzz with a tech-infused economic energy that catered to millennial and “start-up culture” whims. For the next four years, nearly every weekday, I would ride my bike from my home near the Golden Gate Park Panhandle, down McAllister Street hill of Western Addition, through the Tenderloin, ending at Civic Center where I would catch a BART train to my office in Berkeley. My commute often left me with daily reminders of the complex plurality that that coastal, “liberal elite” cities like San Francisco face, where high quality “livability” infrastructure like bicycle lanes, electric transit, and ecological storm water facilities, collide with chronic instances of homelessness and mental health or drug crises within the public realm. While riding along a bright green bicycle lane flanked by other cyclists wearing messenger bags stamped with progressive slogans promoting the environment or other socially liberal causes, I would pass visible signs of human suffering in Civic Center and the Tenderloin that is unconscionable for a wealthy city in the developed world. Walking through the Civic Center BART station, I watched Twitter employees heading to Market Street wearing matching backpacks, hoodies, and iPhone earbuds pass seemingly lifeless forms huddled against the walls of the station and covered by dirty quilts and sleeping bags.

The constant array of deep contrasts I witnessed every day when commuting to work, left me questioning the greater significance of such visible disparity in San Francisco’s broader self-described identity as a socially oriented city. While estimates from the City’s last homelessness survey from 2015 indicate that the number of people living on the street (6,686) increased by an insignificant 7 percent since 2005, San Francisco’s ratio of unsheltered to sheltered residents remains the highest of all major cities in the nation (Applied Survey Research, 2015; Day, 2016). And despite decades of investment in shelter systems and supportive housing developments, along with one of the nation’s highest affordable housing incentive zoning programs, the continued presence of abject poverty in the city illustrates a systemic and complex problem that cannot be remedied by one simple solution (Fagan, 2016).

Given the rapid rate at which income inequality and low-income displacement is transforming the social conditions and power dynamics within neighborhoods throughout San Francisco, the Tenderloin today serves as a vital laboratory for observing and questioning why it has resisted similar types of transformations over the last 50 years. Further, as new districts are revitalized in the city to attract a specific type of user or company, the Tenderloin offers an opportunity to evaluate the need for an inherent messiness in the public life of urban neighborhoods.

This thesis aims to parse a range of urban form and social conditions within the Tenderloin, including both large-scale changes resulting
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directly from decades of top-down planning interventions and private-interest driven city-making, as well as smaller, more recent changes that are skirting traditional planning protocols and transforming the neighborhood in more targeted ways. Together, these findings will inform a holistic definition of the Tenderloin’s role, both today and over the long-term, as a sustainer of low-income people, a shelter for those beyond the scope of the tech industry’s viewfinder, and as a battle ground for preservation of authentic neighborhood grit and culture. As such, the following questions serve as the guiding points of inquiry for this research:

- In 2017, to what extent has the Tenderloin resisted the forces of gentrification that have meanwhile infiltrated bordering neighborhoods such as Union Square and Mid-Market?
- What are the physical and social design qualities of the Tenderloin neighborhood that have allowed it to resist whole-sale changes to its function as a provider of affordable housing and shelter for San Francisco’s most marginalized and vulnerable populations?
- To what extent does the urban form of the Tenderloin allow for continued resistance of gentrification? What role(s) does it allow for planners and designers to assist in curating this continued resistance? And what lessons does the Tenderloin’s resistance offer for planning efforts in other cities as a low-income, inner-city, neighborhood paradigm?
STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Chapter 2 reviews the existing built form and social conditions at play in the Tenderloin today through a field study approach that combines experiential methods like cognitive mapping, observations of people in the public realm, and photography. I begin the chapter with an overview of my specific methods, and then provide detailed accounts of my observational findings.

Chapter 3 offers a historical overview of the planning and urban design policies that have most critically influenced the forms and systems within the Tenderloin. It also provides a deeper analysis of three contemporary planning and urban design strategies in use by City officials today, both within the Tenderloin and the Mid-Market corridor.

Chapter 4 extracts findings from the qualitative field study and the historical policy analysis to illustrate the distinct ways in which the Tenderloin is responding to the forces of gentrification. By applying several theoretical lenses to these findings, the chapter concludes with a set of new planning ideals for generating more equitable and impactful change within the highly rigid built and social forms of the Tenderloin.

Chapter 5 concludes with a series of design recommendations for both the public and private realms that seek to reclaim the use of tactical urbanism as a tool for neighborhoods of all income levels, and also disrupt the traditional strategies for new development in the neighborhood with smaller-scale, more flexible uses.
CHAPTER 2

A WALK THROUGH THE NEIGHBORHOOD: MAKING SENSE OF THE TENDERLOIN’S BUILT AND SOCIAL FORMS

METHODS

This thesis uses a mixed methods approach to illustrate the Tenderloin as it exists today, along with the critical historical events and policies that helped to define its current state. I employed a collection of qualitative, impressionistic, and experiential methods for both navigating the Tenderloin with my own eyes, as well as through the eyes of the local residents, nonprofit workers, and City planners by way of semi-structured interviews. Relying heavily on a field study approach, I developed my own unique methods for assessing the social and physical conditions of the neighborhood that built off of the best practices and findings of notable urban observation theorists and practitioners.

THE FIELD STUDY

During a two-week period over January and March of 2017, I walked the 50-odd blocks of the Tenderloin and Mid-Market throughout the day, observing the street life and creating cognitive maps of my own experiences along each of the blocks. To limit the scope of the field study, I focused particularly on the southeastern two-thirds of the Tenderloin neighborhood, south of Geary Street and east of Larkin Street, where the historical preservation of the original post-Earthquake buildings is most prevalent and the density of social service providers is greatest. This portion of the Tenderloin also had the crucial quality of being closest to the Mid-Market corridor and the recently located tech companies.
I structured my field study using methods developed by leading public life and observational analysis theorists and practitioners. As a theory of research methodology, observational analysis is highly logical and orderly, and offers replicable strategies for measuring qualitative attributes of an environment in objective ways. Classic methods include pedestrian counts, building façade inventories, and tracking of pedestrian movements through space. By layering these different types of analysis, researchers can paint a detailed portrait of a space over time for people who will never themselves experience it firsthand. However, in moving beyond the theoretical and actually applying these methods to a specific neighborhood, observational analysis can become infinitely more nuanced and messy. This proved true in the Tenderloin, where after spending some time in the neighborhood I realized that traditional analysis methods, such as pedestrian counting, would not yield a complete portrait of the neighborhood’s complex social dynamics. As such, the following section details the specific observational analysis theorists I used to lay the groundwork for my field study, along with the explicit ways I adapted their methods to better address my Tenderloin-specific research questions.
Review of Field Study Methods Best Practices and Literature

1. Jan Gehl: How to Study Public Life

Jan Gehl describes his theory of the “human scale” as the essential integer at which architecture and city design must focus in his 1971 aptly named book, The Human Scale. A Danish architect trained in the modernism era, Gehl emerged onto the global urbanism scene with a rebuke of modernism’s effect on city scale around the same time as American urbanists like Jane Jacobs and William Whyte were also formulating similar theories of their own. Gehl argued that modernism’s obsession with the vehicle and oversized forms was a threat to the quality of public life in cities, and he pushed for a deeper understanding of human needs in relation to building form. Through the work of his self-titled architecture and urban design firm, Gehl and his team of designers have spent over 50 years developing “special tools for looking at people” (Gehl & Svarre, 2013). These tools are today referred to amongst Gehl designers as “Public Space and Public Life” studies or PSPL. These methods typically revolve around direct observation of human activity and the physical forms in which it circulates (Gehl & Svarre, 2013). Like a scientist studying organisms under a microscope, the PSPL methods contend that human behavior can be “documented, analyzed, and interpreted” with a neutral objectivity that can be replicated across different urban contexts. The scientific precision of Gehl’s methods also ensure a level of replicability that allows planners to monitor a single place both before and after interventions in the built environment occur.

This pre- and post-evaluation capability helps to further validate or invalidate the impacts of an intervention with hard data that politicians and local residents alike can point to.

More recently, Gehl has adapted its demographically neutral observation methods to specifically record observed social mixing within the public realm—in part as a reaction to growing “economic inequality and spatial divisions of race, class and opportunity” in cities around the world (Gehl Institute, 2016). Through its Public Life Diversity Toolkit, Gehl aims to understand whether people from different socioeconomic groups spend time in a place, and whether or not they interact with each other—and to what extent. As in the original PSPL, Gehl’s research goal is to obtain objective data that could be used to compare different neighborhoods to one another, and to ultimately develop new design strategies for generating more equitable and sustainable public realms. The following list includes a typical suite of methods used by Gehl researchers, with those I used denoted with an asterisk:

- Stationary activity mapping*
- Pedestrian and bicyclist counts
- Surveys tracking respondent age, gender, and perceptions of surroundings
- Public realm inventory mapping of footpath interruptions; climate, noise, and topography*; streetscape elements*; historical sites*; public art*; pavement quality; street trees*; building façade activation*; safety elements; lighting; building entrances*; vehicular traffic conflicts; parking
- Archival data set mapping of social media or other big data sets; neighborhood socioeconomic mix; urban connectivity; price diversity of commercial amenities.

2. Allan Jacobs: Looking at Cities

In Looking at Cities, Allan Jacobs offers planners and designers a suite of tips and techniques for drawing out key social and economic details from observations of the built environment. Written as a guide for passively observing the street level environment while walking through a neighborhood, Jacobs' detailed qualitative insights served as the foundation for my programmatic insights into the Tenderloin’s urban forms and helped me to more fully “see” what was happening in the Tenderloin beyond surface level. Coincidentally, Jacobs also served as Planning Director for the City of San Francisco during its emergence from a three-decade era of heavy-handed urban renewal city-making. Like the city-wide Urban Design Plan that Jacobs helped to shepherd to adoption in 1984, Looking at Cities celebrates the powerful impacts of the built form on the pedestrian experience, and encourages critical assessment of urban design's ability to enhance the street level experience. Jacobs uses quick, hand sketches and annotations to jot down experiential impressions that help to humanize his impressions and isolate only the most essential details of the built environment.

Jacobs provides particularly helpful insights into understanding patterns of change both between and within neighborhoods. Unlike Gehl's detailed inventory checklist approach, Jacobs cautions designers from entering a neighborhood with a predetermined set of elements to inspect or assess:

"Some characteristic of the area makes an impression, and the observer says, "This seems to be an area of "wealth," or of "poverty," or of "local shops." The observer does not necessarily start out with a specific checklist of patterns to be identified; such a checklist can hamper the process of observation. The identification of a new pattern that is not on any checklist may prove the most telling" [A. B. Jacobs, 1984].

3. John Zeisel: Inquiry by Design

A trained sociologist who taught alongside designers at Harvard's Graduate School of design, John Zeisel brings a decidedly scientific approach to observational field study methods. His 1981 guide for understanding the physical, social, and jurisdictional conditions of space through environmental-behavior research methods, Inquiry by Design, offers designers an in-depth set of methods for assessing how people use space given various physical, emotional, political, and environmental contexts [Zeisel, 1981]. In particular, Zeisel focuses on the importance of observing physical traces to understand how people use space and likewise how space dictates behaviors. Traces in the urban environment include those left unconsciously by people, such as worn down grass across the middle of a field, Traces also include more concerted efforts to modify one's environment, such as a pair of crates dragged together to create make-shift seating along a sidewalk [Zeisel, 1981].
“From such traces environment-behavior researchers begin to infer how an environment got to be the way it is, what decisions its designers and builders made about the place, how people actually use it, how they feel toward their surroundings, and generally how that particular environment meets the needs of its users” (Zeisel, 1981).

As described by Zeisel, methods for observing and recording traces include descriptive note taking, annotated diagrams, counting, and photography. Overall, he describes physical traces as falling into one of four categories:

- By-Products of Use: Such traces include erosions of physical building elements public infrastructure, or plant life; leftover objects or materials from a former activity; and missing traces, i.e. the absence of certain traces which indicate what types of activities and user groups are not occupying the public realm.
- Adaptations for Use: Adaptations include props that have been introduced to an environment unnaturally to allow for a different type of activity to occur, such as the presence of a folding chair on the front porch of a house; separations or barriers that provide added forms of screening; and connections, such as planks of wood laid across a flooded sidewalk.
- Displays of Self: These traces include signs of personalization, such as graffiti; identification such as name tags on doorways; and group membership signs.
- Public Messages: These include official messages, such as wall-mounted signage on a ground floor retail unit; and unofficial or illegitimate messages like flyers left in the windshields of parked cars.

4. Annette Kim: Sidewalk City

Given the range of uses and users that utilize its public sidewalks, some of which are more compatible than others, the Tenderloin presents a paradigm of legitimate use of the public realm that begs a deeper definition of "public" and a more nuanced approach to cataloguing activities within its public realm than Gehl or Jacobs provide. In her study of sidewalk and street vending in Ho Chi Minh City, Annette Kim contends that a truly public space where all members of society have "free, unfettered access" does not exist (Kim, 2015). In reality, all types of space, whether public or private, exists on a spectrum of regulation and control. This regulation and control can be highly autocratic via a formal government body, or it can exist in a more temporaneous state, developed and implemented by individuals
over a fleeting period of time. Kim attributes the inevitable regulation of all spaces to two underlying universals:

"First, because of our bodies and the physicality of space, one person's use inevitably excludes another's at any point in time. Second, because of the density of urban areas, we are constantly subject to the proximity of others and so our use depends on others' cooperation" (Kim, 2015).

From this assertion, Kim explores the complex ecosystem of use and control of Ho Chi Minh City's sidewalks using a series of methods that include participant observation, photography, and spatial analysis through Geographic Information Systems. Unlike the methods developed by Gehl, Jacobs, and Zeisel, Kim's are cultivated specifically for an inherently messy, conflicted, and politically charged public realm that does not adhere to typical social norms or expectations—much like the Tenderloin. In her assertion that people "occupy different positions in society that shape their spatial practices", Kim ultimately concludes that a new method of public space observation is necessary to adequately parse the "social and power dynamics mediated in space" (Kim, 2015).

In mapping the sidewalks of Ho Chi Minh City, Kim used eschewed more elaborate GPS devices in favor of classic pen and paper, given the frenetic context of the place and the need for subtle and unobtrusive observation methods (Kim, 2015). With a team of student researchers, Kim assigned pairs to walk each sidewalk segment and survey the location of different vendor types and various non-pedestrian activities occurring within the public realm. Beyond coding these locations and additional descriptions on paper maps, researchers also took pictures to quickly capture the "life" of the sidewalk exhibited by unique arrays of "colors, textures, notable spatial arrangements, and anecdotes" along each street segment (Kim, 2015).

From this initial inventory, Kim developed sidewalk categories for each of the surveyed segments, including leisure, parking for cars or mopeds, begging, and merchandise. By spatially mapping the locations of these various commercial uses, Kim was able to develop an entirely new data set that offers fine-grained insights into the inner workings and power dynamics of a single square of sidewalk.
Chosen Field Study Methods

Given my limitations as a solo researcher with a limited amount of time and resources, I chose a suite of field study methods that did not require a team of researchers, and could be completed within a two-week period. I also considered the unique characteristics of the Tenderloin population in determining my methods, and determined that non-invasive, observational methods would be best given the economic and legal precariousness that many individuals in the neighborhood face. From these limitations and considerations, I chose to incorporate the following tailored suite of methods into the field study component of this thesis:

5. Stationary Activity Mapping

This method is a classic mainstay of Gehl’s PSPLs, and dates back to Jan Gehl’s first forays into public life observations. Its purpose is to understand what kinds of activities people engage in within the public realm, where specifically these activities take place, and how these activities change throughout the course of a day or a week (Gehl Institute, 2016). Researchers sweep through a specific area once an hour and mark on a map the location of the following activity types using a series of shorthand codes: “being, or simply hanging out”, “waiting for transit”, “commercial” (i.e. buying or selling something), “cultural” (i.e. watching a street performer), “physical” (i.e. doing yoga), or “children playing”. A second annotation is made next to each of these codes to indicate the position of the person as they engage in the activity (i.e. standing, sitting on a bench or chair, sitting on the ground, or lying
down). Groups of people are also noted to help assess where activity is happening socially and where more singular or anonymous kinds of activity is taking place.

Stationary activity mapping constituted the bulk of my field study. Given that I was working alone on this field study and had identified over 40 street segments within my study area, I adapted Gehl's activity mapping method to ensure maximum efficiency that prioritized breadth over depth. Rather than capture an hour by hour snapshot of activity along every street in the neighborhood, I chose instead to capture a composite snapshot that compiles small moments of observation throughout a day. As such, my activity mapping findings are not a rigorous indicator of exact volumes of people who use a space at any one moment in time, but rather serve as an overview of how a single moment of observed activity relates with surrounding private realm programming and built forms. Over a two-week period (one week in January and one week in March), I recorded weekday stationary activity on each street segment in the study area twice, once in the morning, and once in the afternoon or early evening. I generally began observations no earlier than 9 AM, and ended no later than 7 PM each day.

Upon spending just a few hours in the Tenderloin, it became apparent that the traditional activity types used in Gehl's PSPLs would not be sufficient for the types of activity I was witnessing. Gehl's methods focus on where and how people are sitting, and whether they are engaging in commercial, cultural, or athletic activities, however these designations were unhelpful for characterizing the Tenderloin. I rarely observed street vending or outdoor commercial dining, nor did I see much evidence of cultural or athletic activities. Further, I noticed immediately that dramatically different types of public ream users appeared to be partaking in somewhat similar activities, i.e. people napping on nearby benches, one who appears to be living on the street and one who appears to be a millennial with an iPhone. Traditional Gehl methods of labeling all users the same would not have captured this important detail, however Jacobs contends that more critical observation of people in the public realm is essential for developing hypotheses about a place:

> “Observing people is useful in making hypotheses, some with certainty and some to speculate about with caution. People’s age, race, and sex are obvious indicators of who lives in or frequents an area. But it is possible to tell more. Clothing styles give on a notion of their interests, life styles and economic status. Fashions change, but it is not difficult to distinguish expensive from inexpensive, or high fashion from conservative or office dress from blue-collar work clothes” (A. B. Jacobs, 1984).

Given these Tenderloin-specific social conditions, I chose to map types of public realm users rather than the traditional Gehl method of mapping public realm activities. I used the following set of stationary activity
codes when mapping activity: “Street dweller” (i.e. someone who shows visible signs of living without formal shelter), “housed residents” (i.e. someone who seems familiar with the neighborhood, but does not show signs of living on the street), “drug dealers and users”, “social service affiliates”, “tourists”, and “tech employees”. In the findings section of this chapter, I offer more detailed descriptions of how I qualified these user groups, and how I observed their relationships to one another and the surrounding built environment.

With this more descriptive coding system for identifying public realm users, I attempted to remain as objective in my analysis as possible. I looked for hard signs of whether someone was living on the street to help protect me from my own biases and assumptions about what homelessness really looks like. For those that I observed sitting or lying on the sidewalk, I also noted the presence of belongings, tattered clothes, certain smells, and physical ailments that would indicate a more long-time resident of the street. I noted the potential location of drug use if I saw an illegal substance or any drug related paraphernalia, and I determined drug sale locations based on conversations overheard, body language by the groups I passed, and in some cases, visible signs of money exchanging hands.

6. Building Façade Inventory

In addition to activity mapping, I also built upon Gehl’s use of ground floor façade inventory to understand the relationship between the perceived programming of the private realm and adjacent public life. As described by Gehl, activated facades with a high frequency of entrances helps to predict types of proximate street life, and offer opportunities for both planned or spontaneous social interactions (Gehl Institute, 2016). While Gehl’s façade quality categorizations have evolved over the last fifty years, the 2016 Public Life Diversity Toolkit’s categorizations offer insight into how Gehl currently operates these inventories. The following list of categorizations serve as a ranking of facades, from highest quality to lowest:

- “Vibrant” is defined as facades with small units, a density of entrances, high levels of transparency or fenestration, a lack of vacant or passively used units, and high quality architecture with good articulation, materials, and detailing.
- “Active” facades are those with small units with some transparency, relatively few passive units, and some architectural detail and articulation.
- “Dull” facades typically include more corporate or institutional facades, with large units, few entrances, low levels of transparency, some passive units, and very few architectural detailing.
- “Inactive” includes parking or vacant lots, large units with few entrances and no transparency, a high frequency of passive units, and uniform facades with nothing for pedestrians to look at.
- “Monument” facades encompass special buildings that do not easily fit into the previous categories. They include historic or visually interesting facades that “may not be very active or transparent” but are important drives of surrounding street activity nonetheless.

These categorizations are easily replicated in any urban neighborhood setting given the
A Walk Through the Neighborhood

Ground floor retail mixed with residential above creates a livelier street scene and tended to attract more pedestrians during observations.

Ground floor of Mosser Towers is mostly opaque.
ubiquitous nature of the façade elements they describe. However, they focus exclusively on physical qualities of the building form, resulting in groupings of building facades that may look visually similar but perform dramatically different functions for a dramatically different set of users. Further, that Gehl attributes higher levels of street life to more transparent façades with higher frequencies of storefronts and entrances disregards the impact that social service institutions in the Tenderloin play in drawing people to the surrounding sidewalk. Further, Gehl’s categories give preference to a certain style of ground floor unit that tends to evoke a classic main street retail feeling: small, visually distinct shops with high frequencies of windows or openings. While this type of building façade does not exist in the Tenderloin’s streets nonetheless continue to attract a variety of people throughout the course of the day. Land uses offer clues to the passerby of what “nature of activity” occurs within a building, and what types of people it caters to (A. B. Jacobs, 1984). In an attempt to realize these limitations of Gehl’s methods with regards to the Tenderloin, I chose not to classify buildings solely by their physical and architectural qualities, but rather through a combination of classic land use descriptors (residential, retail, commercial services, office or professional, vacant and/or parking) and the following more nuanced categorizations that address building program as well as form:

- “SRO” facades had visible lobbies, often with security measures of some sort, such as cameras, a visible front desk or security employee, and descriptive signage discouraging non-resident lingering or trespassing. Given the unique programmatic elements of SROs, it seemed imperative to differentiate these building entrances from other residential buildings.
“Social Service Centers” captured a range of building types, including the recently built St. Anthony’s Dining Room and older buildings like the pre-1900 St. Boniface Church. These façade types are unified by their clear signage alerting pedestrians to the institution’s presence.

“Ambiguous Facades” are those which betray very little indication of their internal programming to pedestrians. I included this category to account for the high frequency of ground floor units that physically would have scored relatively high on Gehl’s façade inventory index given their human scale features and high quality architectural detailing, yet did not demonstrate a readily identifiable ground floor use. On some streets, these façade types dominated the street wall and from afar created a visually vibrant and articulated street scene. Yet when observed up close, these buildings typically had shuttered or otherwise obscured ground floor windows that resulted in a less active relationship between street and building than expected.

“Gentrified Ground Floor” units included a mixture of new and old building types with a design aesthetic that clearly catered to non-traditional Tenderloin residents with greater financial means. Like many of the ambiguous facades, these units would likely score quite high on Gehl’s traditional façade inventory index, yet their design elements send important cues to passersby that their interior uses are for those with disposable incomes.

While walking through the neighborhood with a parcel and building footprint map, I labeled the location of each façade type as I walked passed.
7. Impressionistic Field Notes

In addition to the regimented activity and façade mapping methods, I also made note of more open-ended, impressionistic observations of the following elements on a map of the neighborhood as I walked along each block: climate (shade and sun); noise (vehicle and human); topography (directional slopes); signage; streetscape environment (average street wall heights, right-of-way widths, sidewalk conditions, street trees or landscaping, street furnishings, and evidence of recent streetscape improvements); historical sites (designated by historical markers affixed to buildings); public art (locations of murals and sculptures); building entrances; use of buildings and surrounding land (specifically where the domains of different nonprofits extended into the public realm and how the feeling of a street shifted depending on the time of day or the types of uses observed); building material and maintenance condition; garbage or refuse; drug-related paraphernalia; special purpose buildings (religious facilities, major institutions, government, arts and culture centers, educational facilities); artifacts and historic markers.

This list primarily includes building form elements described by Jacobs, and Tenderloin-specific traces developed through Zeisel’s methods. It is also heavily influenced by Kim’s physical surveying method, which prioritized the use of simple paper maps and pens to quickly jot down locations of various observed elements, and a quick succession of photographs to capture other sensory and textural details that could be recalled later (Kim, 2015). In recording the presence of these elements, some were denoted with a simple symbol, while for others I provided a narrative description to further contextualize certain qualities of the street scene and create a memorable and unique “impression” of each street segment. Building off of methods described by Gehl and Jacobs, I also occasionally jotted down quick sketches of observed building forms or social systems. Like a diary of observations, this method of quickly recording and sketching details as I walked through the neighborhood helped me to track the emergence of physical and social patterns of change across the entire neighborhood over a two-week period that would have otherwise been difficult to track using other archival methods.

Specifically building off of Jacobs’ theory of observing change, I also repeatedly looked for signs of the following change categories in the Tenderloin, as described in Looking at Cities:

- Quantity of Change: In some cases, recent renovations or development along a street is isolated to a single building or a solitary ground floor unit. In other cases, the majority of a block exhibits signs of new construction. I noted signs of recent visible building improvements to determine proportional densities of investment and property change within the neighborhood.

- Cycles of Change: As buildings and owners age, change in the built form is inevitable. Thus, I looked to older buildings in the Tenderloin that were not particularly well-maintained as potential sites where ownership is more likely to transfer in the near future. Similarly, buildings with visible signage indicating the presence of
well-defined, long-term leasing scenarios (i.e. occupation by major social service institutions or residential buildings operated by nonprofit organizations) suggest that such buildings are unlikely to shift to a higher-end clientele in the immediate future.

- Directions of Change: I noted overall directional shifts between blocks with more “traditional” Tenderloin uses (local ethnic restaurants, liquor and/or corner stores, less maintained building facades, the presence of trash or discarded objects in the street, visible signs of homelessness etc.) to more gentrified or non-descript surrounding areas with either higher-end retail uses or less visible low-income indicators.  

- Vulnerability to Change: These observations included “for sale” signs in windows; recent development that seemed to result from an assemblage of smaller parcels; seemingly affordable residential buildings with high-quality architectural details that suggest they could be made to appeal to market-rate renters with only cosmetic changes; and tech-employee pedestrian patterns moving through the neighborhood between wealthier Nob Hill and the Mid-Market corridor.
Additional Methods

8. Semi-Structured Stakeholder Interviews

Interviews with Tenderloin stakeholders and City planners provided me with invaluable insight into both the history of the Tenderloin and the Tax Break, as well as more present-day conditions. Interviews were conducted between January and March of 2017 both over the phone or in-person, and typically lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours. I used an organic snowballing strategy for obtaining access to my interviewees. Local officials and nonprofit housing representatives were contacted through my existing personal and academic networks. From there, I was able to connect to residents, other government employees, and tech company representatives. As a Tenderloin outsider who was 3,000 miles away from the neighborhood while gathering the majority of my research, I relied heavily on these early interviews as a method for guiding my research inquiries and honing in on key elements of the neighborhood that deserved further assessment. While I had originally sought to focus this thesis on the Tax Break itself, conversations with residents, planners, and nonprofit housing representatives inspired me to shift the focus of my research more towards the Tenderloin’s built and social forms, and the new paradigm of gentrification that they present.

Overall, I conducted 15 semi-structured interviews made up of the following collection of interviewees:

- 3 San Francisco City Planners
- 1 San Francisco Department of Public Health staff member
- 1 Former staff member from the Office of District 6 Supervisor Jane Kim
- 1 Mayor’s Office of Economic and Workforce Development staff member
- 3 Residents/neighborhood activists
- 4 Representatives of nonprofit housing development organizations working in the Tenderloin

The neighborhood is filled with murals, like this one in front of the Tenderloin Community School.
While I provided a list of questions to interviewees ahead of the conversation that asked basic questions about their organization’s role in the Tenderloin, I encouraged them to speak freely about their perceptions of the neighborhood and how they saw change occurring. Residents were particularly helpful with describing the qualitative details of their lives in the neighborhood, and in offering critiques of Tenderloin and Mid-Market planning and urban design efforts to-date. They described a conflicted neighborhood that exhibits strong community values, and also incredible strife and general suffering. From these conversations in particular, I refocused my second field study in March to specifically catalogue sidewalk activity in the Tenderloin as a method for gleaning more objective answers about what kind of neighborhood the Tenderloin truly is, and what kind of neighborhood it could become.

9. Spatial Analysis

Following my field study and conversations with locals, I used Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to analyze the patterns and trends of both elements from my first-hand observations as well as from data sets collected from the City of San Francisco’s open data portal, DataSF.org. Through this analysis, I began to detect themes of change and themes of permanence within the neighborhood, derived from both large-scale planning interventions, and smaller more targeted ones. I also explored overlaps between certain observed social groups and building form and program. I grouped my findings into social fabric and built form categories to further understand their unique motivations, implications, and overall significance within the larger narrative of ‘planning for change and permanence’ in a low-income neighborhood battling powerful forces of gentrification.
Chapter 2

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: TENDERLOIN STREET-LEVEL OBSERVATIONS

Located just to the west of Downtown, the Tenderloin is a relatively small, visually cohesive neighborhood that occupies a compact, rectangular area of roughly 40 blocks—though its precise boundaries have been disputed by residents, city officials, property owners, and real estate agents for decades. The neighborhood generally covers the flatter area south of the higher-income Nob Hill, west of Downtown and the Union Square retail and tourism district, east of the City’s government and arts district known as Civic Center, and north of Market Street and the SoMa neighborhood.  

Though the vast majority of its buildings do not exceed six to eight stories due to a zoning height restriction, the Tenderloin feels like a high density, frenetic neighborhood. People seem to be gathering everywhere—on corners, outside apartment building entrances, in the doorways of stores and restaurants, and on the sidewalk. The lack of building setbacks and street furniture along its streets results in a bustling public realm where people are using sidewalks for both walking and gathering—a relative necessity given the high number of small single-room apartments in the neighborhood. The sidewalks are also used throughout the day as places to sit or sleep by the neighborhood’s sizeable population of homeless and marginally housed persons. On most blocks within the neighborhood it is common to see a mixture of different types of “lingering” activities occurring on the sidewalk, from casual socializing, to solitary people watching, to various states of sleeping or resting. Compared to the nearby Union Square district, this kind of long-term, deviant lingering on the sidewalk is largely tolerated by residents and police officers alike, so long as it does not take place near a school or other youth facility. To some extent, the widely-held perception of the Tenderloin as a place where the homeless and drug users roam the streets freely is not unfounded. This neighborhood serves as a tacit containment zone for the city where certain activities and behaviors are permitted by law enforcement, presumably so that they do not occur in other surrounding areas where tourists or high-earning employees are more populous.

As one moves further from the neighborhood core, new building types and land uses start to appear within the street scene, thrusting a new urban character into the neighborhood that is not as readily identifiable as “Tenderloin”. The larger clusters of people sleeping on the sidewalks or visibly using drugs dissipate, and there is a noticeable shift in the appearance and behaviors of the passing pedestrians. The transition out of the Tenderloin can be subtle, particularly along its southern border with the Mid-Market area. From an urban design standpoint, the historic, residential hotel forms of the Tenderloin easily contrast with the more contemporary and commercial Mid-Market buildings. However, the social activities and observed behaviors are not as readily pulled apart.

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1 For the purposes of this study, I will focus on the core of the Tenderloin neighborhood as bounded by O’Farrell, Larkin, McAllister, and Mason Streets.
Some streets are highly active, both with heavy vehicle traffic and higher concentrations of sidewalk dwelling.

Children are very visible in the neighborhood and add to the diversity of street life.
Chapter 2

URBAN FABRIC

The Tenderloin is a physically dense and hardscaped neighborhood by San Francisco standards, with no front setbacks or landscaping, an unwavering street wall of three- to seven-story buildings, and limited rows of tree canopies lining its streets. It is blanketed by a relentless grid of 412.5-foot by 275-foot blocks and identical right-of-ways of nearly 70 feet in width, which result in a highly uniform and formal public realm framework. This precise gridiron formation dates back to the City’s heritage as a Mexican pueblo or village called Yerba Buena (W. W. Robinson, 1979). The first formal subdivision effort for Yerba Buena took place in 1839, when local Mexican officials hired a Swiss-immigrant named Jean-Jacques Vioget, to survey and plat a small, 12-block portion of the town that occupies present-day San Francisco’s Financial District. Vioget used a traditional method of the times to plat the land where two surveyors would ride on horseback, holding a 100-vara-long change between them to mark off the lengths of a block. The “vara”, a Spanish measuring increment used throughout their early colonization efforts in California, equaled approximately 33 inches (Moudon, 1986). Each block was 150 by 100 varas (412.5 by 275 feet), and contained six identical lots of 50 by 50 varas (137.5 by 137.5 feet). These initial lot designations would continue to organically subdivide over the years, ensuring an array of unique but consistent parcelization patterns throughout the neighborhood. A second, more expansive survey covering 800 total acres was completed in 1847, the year Yerba Buena transformed into the American port town of San Francisco, by Jasper O’Farrell, who continued Vioget’s grid pattern for the blocks north of Market Street. South of Market Street, O’Farrell platted the blocks four times larger, presumably because he preferred the larger scale. He also rotated the axis of the gridiron to better align with the natural formation of the valley (Moudon, 1986). O’Farrell’s survey, otherwise known as the Bartlett Map, was expanded upon two years later by a second American Surveyor, William M. Eddy. This second official subdivision of San Francisco, known as the Eddy Map and completed in 1851, extended west all the way to Larkin Street, and included the present-day boundaries of the Tenderloin (Moudon, 1986).

The methodical precision of these maps ensured a relatively consistent street hierarchy in the Tenderloin. While other neighborhoods in the city feature a more complex ecosystem of arterials, boulevards, neighborhood streets, and alleys that create urban fabric hierarchies, the Tenderloin is notable for its lack of street type and width variation. Its perfectly uniform blocks create a methodical underlying rhythm as one moves through the neighborhood, and help to define its formal boundaries. As one approaches Market Street, the angle of the boulevard creates triangular wedge-shaped blocks that alert the pedestrian that she is leaving the Tenderloin.

The consistent, walkable dimensions of the Tenderloin’s block system should not however be equated with the overall quality of its pedestrian environment as the neighborhood harbors some of the most dangerous streets for pedestrians in all of San Francisco (Juan Carlos Cancino et al., 2015). Most are three-lane, single-direction streets with signal timing
that effectively transforms the streets into urban expressways through the neighborhood. Despite featuring many pedestrian-oriented streetscape elements such as wide sidewalks, parallel parking, street trees, and a consistent street wall, the speed at which vehicle traffic move along Tenderloin streets, coupled with the lengthy crossing distances make for an adverse environment as soon as the pedestrian leaves the safety of the sidewalk. Additionally, the coordinated traffic signals result in an almost tidal flow for many of the neighborhood’s streets. Within a span of under five minutes, a Tenderloin street transforms from one that is filled with cars barreling through at speeds above the posted 25 mile-per-hour, to a street with no cars in sight where pedestrians casually jay-walk or talk to one another in the street. This ebb and flow exhibited on many of the neighborhood’s streets results in a conflicted streetscape identity where people are both the dominant and the secondary user of the right-of-way on a single street segment.

Unlike other residential neighborhoods in the City, the Tenderloin is notable for its lack of a “main street” serving as the spatial organizing factor, off which social and civic functions of the neighborhood align. For the Mission, it is Mission Street (although Valencia also serves a similar function), in Western Addition there is Divisadero Street, and The Haight of course has Haight Street. By comparison, the Tenderloin does not have a single main street which all other streets and activities orient around, and instead spreads the responsibilities across several different streets, each performing their own blend of “main street” functions. Golden Gate Avenue is the “CBD” of the Tenderloin with a nearly unbroken chain of social service and institutional uses lining its ground floors from Larkin Street to Jones Street. However, it has few residential buildings compared to other streets, and its location at the bottom of the neighborhood keeps it from feeling like the true heart of the Tenderloin. Larkin Street, particularly its two northern blocks between O’Farrell and Eddy, is the Tenderloin’s “restaurant district” with its many Asian restaurants and specialty shops. Located along the eastern border of the neighborhood, the street is often mixed with lunchtime crowds from the Civic Center office buildings. Finally, there is Hyde Street. Located in the center of the neighborhood running north to south, Hyde Street is a magnet for sidewalk activity and street life, but also serves as a hotspot for open-air drug sales and use.
Parts of the neighborhood with older building stock feature a strongly pedestrian character with well-proportioned buildings, active ground floors, and clear crosswalks.

Streets fluctuate between states of heavy vehicle traffic and no traffic.
LOT SIZES

The neighborhood features a range of parcel sizes, that offer clues for understanding both its development history and its potential for future change. As described previously, block structure and parcelization of the neighborhood was determined by the original 1839 Vioget plat map, that was extended to contain the Tenderloin neighborhood area in 1851. For the next 150 years, these lots have continued to both subdivide and consolidate organically, resulting in a collection of blocks with a patchwork pattern of lot sizes that range in width from roughly 25 feet (10 varas) to over 137.5 feet, which is larger than the original 50 vara subdivision.

Anne Vernez Moudon describes this evolution in her book, Built for Change, which explores the urban form of the Tenderloin-adjacent Western Addition neighborhood:

"The initial development, or morphogenesis, of the city can be seen as a series of negotiations between what exists and what will replace it. As a result, change is mostly incremental; it occurs on a parcel-by-parcel basis." (Moudon, 1986)

Moudon's findings in the Western Addition translate easily to the Tenderloin, where the original gridiron formation of the neighborhood continues to dominate the urban form. The lasting presence of this 1851 subdivision, despite decades of redevelopment in the neighborhood, highlights the irreversible implications of its design, and the burden it places on new development to follow a predetermined design order. Change must always occur within an increment or multiple of the original lot proportions. As such, the original subdivision of the neighborhood continues to serve as the spirit of the neighborhood as the "basic module in which change will take place" (Moudon, 1986). While very few of the original 25-foot-wide Vara parcels remain in the Tenderloin today, they continue to serve as the limiting factor for how change in the neighborhood occurs. Moudon describes these original lots as the "basic cell of the neighborhood fabric", written with a DNA that predetermines the grain and scale of the neighborhood. The grain and scale results in obvious physical attributes, such as building heights, setbacks, and street wall lengths. Yet they also result in more invisible attributes, like social control and territories, that are equally important to the character and quality of the neighborhood.

By comparing lot widths to one another in terms of their relationship to the original 50-vara-wide lot, the relationship between change and block subdivisions becomes more apparent. Though most of the neighborhood blocks have been fragmented beyond their six original lots, there are several dozen lots scattered throughout the neighborhood that are 50 vara wide (137.5 feet). Yet these lots are not necessarily original lots configurations, nor do they necessarily host older buildings. On Jones street, between Turk Street and Golden Gate Avenue, two parcels with original 50 vara dimensions contain an affordable housing development built in the early nineties. Similarly, the 2014
A Walk Through the Neighborhood

Lots Per Block

Subdivisions and Merges from Original Eddy Map

Configuration Breakdown and Example Arrangement

- One-Quarter or Less of Original
- One-Third of Original
- One-Half of Original
- Slightly Less Than Original
- Original Vara Lot
- Slightly Larger Than Original
- Double or Greater Than Original
St. Anthony’s Dining Room development across Golden Gate Street to the south also occupies a 50-vara-wide lot. Of the Tenderloin’s four official parks, three abut property lines that are 50 vara. Together, these findings suggest that the original lot configuration determined by Vioget continue to serve as a helpful unit size within the neighborhood, and play a critical role in both new development and open space preservation.

The majority of lots within the neighborhood are smaller subdivisions of the original 50 vara lot width. The Tenderloin’s east-west streets in particular feature a higher frequency of lots that are one-half, one-third, and one-fifth the size of the original lot width. Virtually all of these narrower lots are presently inhabited by older building stock that pre-dates 1950, whereas development from the peak Urban Renewal era (1950s through the 1980s) is nearly all located on parcels that are either 50 vara wide or greater. More contemporary development (1990s to present day) is less clear-cut, and appears to occupy both small parcels and larger consolidated ones. These findings suggest that while parcelization of the neighborhood has helped to facilitate a density of different facades that create a visually interesting street scene, newer development tends to locate in larger parcels. While there are a handful of mega-structure developments in the Tenderloin, such as the Hilton Hotel near the Tenderloin’s eastern border with Union Square, and the institutional and government buildings along Larkin Street, the relative lack of consolidated parcels in the core of the neighborhood illustrates the incredible power that the original lot structure continues to hold over contemporary development in the Tenderloin as the container into which it must adapt. The abundance of small parcels also confirms what casual observations from walking through the neighborhood suggest—that the Tenderloin is not a gentrified neighborhood, and has largely withstood market pressures to adapt its fine-grain forms.
A Walk Through the Neighborhood

Typical liner grain buildings sit next to Mosser Towers

Conference attendees at the Hilton Hotel are dwarfed by the buildings dimensions

The view of Mosser Towers from the sidewalk
BUILDING TYPOLOGIES AND USES

As alluded to in the previous section, the Tenderloin contains many of the city’s oldest buildings, which date back to the few years immediately following the 1906 earthquake and fire when redevelopment in the city progressed at a feverish pace. This rapid rebuild is a contributing factor to the visual cohesion of the neighborhood, given that many of the buildings were designed by the same limited collection of architects. The consistency in form and style of the neighborhood’s building stock offers an immediate sense of arrival within the neighborhood. In 2009, 409 of the neighborhood’s remaining historic structures were designated as part of the Uptown Tenderloin Historic District—a federal registry of historic places that helps to further protect the buildings from any large-scale external alterations. Although the level of upkeep and restoration varies between these historic buildings, all generally exhibit architectural features and detailing that illustrates the importance and grandeur that this neighborhood once commanded. Intricate cornice work and crown moldings are further highlighted when contrasted with the few nonnative structures that infiltrated the neighborhood beginning in the 1950s. Overall, the purity of these older buildings’ forms is notable. Whereas in nearby Union Square many early 1900s buildings have been retrofitted with more modern, glitzy storefronts and signage, the Tenderloin’s ground floor commercial units generally lack bold architectural or stylistic fixings and offer a more neutral, cohesive tone for the entire neighborhood. There are of course exceptions to this rule. In recent years, new businesses catering to higher end clientele have opened in the neighborhood, bringing with them a design aesthetic that boldly differentiates itself from surrounding units in an attempt to beckon millennial patrons.

At its heart, the Tenderloin is a residential neighborhood that celebrates the human scale, with streets lined with building entrances and windows designed perfectly for people watching. Its residential and commercial store fronts have just enough variation in their coloring and embellishments to create visual interest along the street, but so much variation that they the natural rhythm of the street wall. Murals, historic plaques, and carefully preserved buildings dot the neighborhood, further impressing that this is a neighborhood which values the pedestrian experience and understands the importance of visual interest and vibrancy in cities. Most of its historic residential buildings are multi-unit structures containing either apartment dwellings (private bathroom and kitchen), or hotel rooms (no kitchen and sometimes no bathroom as well). These buildings are generally narrow (between 50 and 60 feet wide), and feature a mixture of large, half-floor lobbies, and smaller more compact entrances. Newer residential buildings in the neighborhood have much larger footprints, and are notable for their lack of attempt to reference the architectural features of the historic structures. Their oversized and monotonous forms often result in distinct microclimates where their adjacent street segments are shrouded in shadows throughout the day.

In addition to the residential uses, an abundance of nonprofits, social services, educational and youth facilities, faith-based organizations, and
A Walk Through the Neighborhood

Building Construction Age

Legend:
- 1900
- 1950
- 2000
- 2016

Scale:
- 3 ft
- 250 ft
- 500 ft
government services are based within the neighborhood. There are roughly 86 different social service organizations operating in the neighborhood throughout the course of a week, which creates a steady mix of residents and non-residents walking and gathering around the neighborhood throughout the day. Like the tech employees in Mid-Market, the employees and volunteers of these organizations are sometimes identified by the organization-branded apparel they wear.

More recent development in the Tenderloin constructed in the last 25 years features strong ties to the Tenderloin’s abundant nonprofit organization landscape. Nearly all of the neighborhood’s affordable residential developments are either owned or operated by nonprofits, which includes very recent projects such as the 2014-completed St. Anthony Foundation dining hall and Mercy Housing affordable senior development at Golden Gate Avenue and Jones Street, as well as older larger affordable unit stalwarts like the 1993-constructed 111 Jones Street. Nearly all of this contemporary construction in the Tenderloin is large footprint, and typically includes some sort of neighborhood commercial or community service on its ground floor topped with between 8 and 9 stories of residential.
Shorter buildings on Hyde Street allow for continuous sunlight on the street and sidewalk.

Whimsical painting on the 826 Valencia building adds to the street's character.
SURROUNDING CONTEXT

The condition of the Tenderloin’s built forms and social systems is in part a reflection of the neighborhoods that surround it. To its west is Union Square, a glittering shrine to post-urban-renewal consumer-oriented placemaking, where high-end retail and restaurant chains combine with large hotels and quintessential tourism venue, the Powell Street cable cars. It is a larger than life spectacle of consumerism opportunities that blends private commercial space with highly curated public space to an almost imperceptible distinction. While the Tenderloin has no chain retail stores within its boundaries, Union Square functions like public-private outdoor shopping mall with dozens of major retail chains. The contrasts between these two neighborhoods is also visible from afar.

When walking through the Tenderloin, the single tower of the Union Square Hilton Hotel is visible from nearly every intersection. 46 stories of sharp edges and gleaming metal loom ominously over the Tenderloin—a constant reminder of the pressure for higher-end, higher-capacity development that nearly wiped the neighborhood and all of its low-income residents from the map. The Hotel also stands as a reminder of what this neighborhood once achieved as the ultimate underdog fighting for its life against the upper echelon of corporate America. In 1981, under siege from a growing hotel industry expanding out of Union Square, Tenderloin neighborhood activists succeeded in slowing the market-rate development that encroached its borders by rallying political support to introduce a neighborhood-wide height limit. This maneuver bought the neighborhood time in its fight against gentrification, but it did not solve the inherent issue of the Tenderloin being a low-income, working-class neighborhood in a high-value, central San Francisco location.

Today, new versions of the 1980s Hilton Hotel are encroaching on the Tenderloin in the forms of luxury housing, “tech” offices, and high-end ‘lifestyle’ retail. Due in part to the Tax Break, the rapid influx of tech companies, and their millennial employees with disposable incomes, transformed the economic character of the Mid-Market corridor along the southern border of the Tenderloin. Ironically, in the 1940s, south of Market (SoMa) was the slum town to the Tenderloin’s vibrant theatre district. Today, it is SoMa that is pushing up against the Tenderloin as a growing number of tech companies with deep, venture-capital pockets look for new real estate deals in the city’s newest downtown “tech” corridor. As Mid-Market transforms from a boarded-up, economically depressed area into a high-end lifestyle center for some of the city’s wealthiest companies and their employees, the Tenderloin is back on familiar territory as the underdog in a battle against gentrification.

South of the Tenderloin is Mid-Market, a more recently coined subarea that serves as the dividing line between the Tenderloin and SoMa, and as the primary focus of the Mayor-initiated Tax Break. A distinct departure from the Tenderloin in terms of building form, yet not quite a neighborhood on its own, the Mid-Market corridor covers the portion of Market Street between Union Square and Van Ness Avenue. As the city’s main transit thoroughfare where its light rail system and buses meet with
Walk Through the Neighborhood

Westfield Shopping Center on Market Street marks the start of the Union Square neighborhood.

The 46-story Hilton Hotel tower is visible from nearly every point in the Tenderloin.
Chapter 2

the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) regional subway system, it is also the seam in the City’s urban fabric where the street grid pattern that dominates the northern hemisphere of the city attaches with the rotated grid pattern of the city’s southern hemisphere. From this fusion comes a network of triangular shaped “half-blocks” and intersections of 3 or 4 different streets that expand the field of view for pedestrians approaching Market Street from the north, and also create new opportunities for built form and public realm not present in the Tenderloin.

Physically, Mid-Market has changed more dramatically than the Tenderloin in the six years since the tax break began. Many of the corridor’s blocks that have not already been significantly renovated for new tech company or retail occupants are either under construction or soon to be. Construction cranes loom high above the street, and the sound of jack hammers fill the air. Within each block however, change is happening at different scales, with some blocks exhibiting a complete overhaul of buildings and tenants, and others that continue to feature a few buildings that look much like they did in 2011. Ironically, in the spring of 2017 many of the corridor’s building facades were vacant or boarded up due to construction or ongoing development review—creating the very same inactive street wall condition that local officials were looking to correct with the Tax Break in 2011.

This patchwork pattern of redevelopment has also resulted in a system of contested space along the corridor with visible territories carved out by different users of the public realm. On blocks with greater proportions of high-end office and newer ground floor retail uses, the culture of the sidewalk is dominated by the office workers who walk and talk freely along the sidewalks as if the public sidewalk is an extension of their office. Security guards are constant fixtures in front of many buildings, and signs of homelessness are rare. On other blocks where redevelopment is either ongoing or not yet in motion, the control of the sidewalks shifts away from the tech companies and back towards the populations that pre-dated the Tax Break. On some corners, 10 to 20 people will control the public realm for most of the day, socializing, playing music, walking in an out of the nearby check-cashing store, and possibly engaging in drug sales. The next morning, they are back at the same spot, holding tight to the territory they have managed to retain as the corridor transforms. Within these sections of Mid-Market where non-tech populations exert control, homelessness, street vending, and people exhibiting signs of intoxication or more extreme mental health episodes are more likely to appear, as are City police officers.
A Walk Through the Neighborhood

Key Observed Uses and Services

- Tech Office
- Tech-Serving Ground Floor Commercial
- Critical Social Service Providers
- Other Social Service
- Transit Station Entrance
- Private Shuttle Stop
- Non-Profit SRO
- Other Affordable Housing
  - Private SRO
  - Other Affordable Housing
The Tenderloin neighborhood sits within the boundaries of three distinct development restriction and economic incentive boundaries that cover a spectrum of planning ideals and actions and have impacted the potential for and rate of physical and social change within the neighborhood for over four decades. Some The following section introduces the three particular regulatory boundaries that today continue to define the Tenderloin.

The Central Market Street and Tenderloin Area Payroll Tax Exclusion (the Tax Break) Boundary (2011)

The Tax Break is the most contemporary of the major built environment regulations governing the Tenderloin, and generally covers the stretch of Market Street from just north of 5th Street to slightly south of 10th Street, and the southern half of the Tenderloin between Ellis Street and McAllister. It excludes properties with existing higher-density, large-footprint office space, and avoids the civic and institutional uses of Civic Center and Polk Street. Its southern-most tip is anchored by the flagship of the Tax Break, the 10-story rehabilitated San Francisco Furniture Exchange building at 1355 Market Street that Twitter leased in 2011 as its new corporate headquarters. Today the building hosts over fifty other companies, including satellite offices for larger companies like Microsoft as well as smaller start-ups, and over a dozen different restaurants and high-end food court stalls. Directly across 10th Street from Twitter is the NEMA, a 754-unit, 19-story story luxury apartment building that has struggled to lease its ground floor commercial unit since its 2013 completion.

As Market Street runs north from the Twitter headquarters, the Tax Break boundaries capture a mixed array of properties, from other large mixed-use office developments like the Warfield Theatre building that includes new ground floor retail with Spotify’s offices above, to older and smaller buildings containing discount clothing stores, and smoke shops in their ground floor. Some redevelopment has also occurred in smaller pieces, such as the Zendesk office at 1019 Market Street. Located within a 50-foot-wide, six-story, former furniture building with ornate Corinthian columns and floor-to-ceiling windows that offer the employees inside an expansive viewport with which to watch the life of the Mid-Market street scene below. With much shorter buildings flanking its sides, the narrow Zendesk building stands like an obelisk on the street that glows in the evening to reveal expansive open floorplan offices with trendy desks, lounge seating, and lighting fixtures.

Despite the fact that most of the parcels included in the Tax Break boundaries are actually within the Tenderloin neighborhood and not along Market Street, virtually no firms have located in the neighborhood. Instead, they have clustered exclusively along Market Street, helping to spur this dramatic face-life for the corridor that stands in stark contrast to the land uses and developments types of the Tenderloin. Given the relative lack of tech-related redevelopment within the Tenderloin
portion of the Tax Break area, its boundaries reveal an optimistic yet largely unsupported effort to bring the Tenderloin along on Mid-Market's gentrification ascent; and it alludes to the presence of other more powerful forces in the Tenderloin that have stymied the kind of rapid redevelopment and rent escalation exhibited by Mid-Market.

80-Foot Building Height Restrictions (1981)

Nearly all Tenderloin parcels are restricted to a maximum building height of 80 feet, while starting at Polk Street to the west the maximum increases to 130 feet and to the east, beginning at the site of the Hilton Hotel on Taylor Street, the maximum increases to 225. The result of these restrictions is a canyon-like effect for the neighborhood where the center of the Tenderloin feels a relatively low valley with tall cliffs surrounding it on all sides. Compared to the neighboring Downtown streets where street widths are roughly the same but buildings consistently reach over 100 feet, the Tenderloin's streets are filled with daylight even into the late afternoon, and the proportions of its buildings ensure that most are fully within the pedestrian's frame of view as they walk down the street. This distinction in heights between the Tenderloin and surrounding neighborhoods is the result of a zoning amendment passed in 1981 which decreased the maximum allowed building height from 320 to 80 feet. The political timeline of this amendment and its continued implications on the neighborhood is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.
Uptown Tenderloin Historic District (2009)

Led by efforts from local neighborhood affordable housing advocate, Randy Shaw of the Tenderloin Housing Clinic, and architectural historian, Michael Corbett, in 2009 409 properties situated within 33 blocks of the Tenderloin neighborhood were designated as part of the Uptown Tenderloin Historic District, a National Register of Historic Places listing (Corbett & Bloomfield, 2008; King, 2009). The district’s historical significance is attributed to both the historical purity of its building stock and urban form, as well as its rich history of social events and the array of different demographic groups it has hosted. While a federal historic district status increases the availability of tax credits for property owners who improve the quality of their historic structures, the historic district designation otherwise has little impact on the development restrictions for a property (King, 2009). As described by those who spearheaded its creation, the historic district was largely intended as an economic development spark for the downtrodden neighborhood by offering a unique suite of tourism opportunities not found elsewhere in the city. Beyond historically significant architecture, neon signs, and vintage sidewalk stamps, Shaw envisioned the programming of the SROs themselves as a key tourism draw.

“We can bring people into an SRO and show them where people are living now... And that’s a real plus” (Shaw, 2010).

Today, the results of the historic district designation are visible in the hundreds of plaques affixed to contributing buildings and sidewalks describing the relevant events of the past. The Tenderloin Museum, a venture spearheaded by Shaw, opened in 2015 (Whiting, 2015), in the ground floor unit of the historic Cadillac Hotel—the neighborhood’s oldest operating nonprofit SRO. Visitors can peruse museum’s ‘scrapbook-like’ displays of old photos documenting the past presence of music greats, sports heroes, a lively bar and night club scene, and social events from the gay and lesbian movement. Mentions of the drugs, prostitution, or crime that characterized the neighborhood in the middle of the 20th Century are described with a sense of ironic nostalgia given that beyond the museum walls people in the Tenderloin are actively injecting heroin. For an extra $5, a guided tour of the neighborhood and an up-close look at real people living in a SRO are thrown into the admission price, just as Shaw envisioned. The museum is not concerned with the current state of social and political affairs in the neighborhood, but rather serves as a time capsule of the people and programs that once defined this neighborhood.
Many buildings and electric signs in the Tenderloin have been masterfully restored.
EXISTING HOUSING TYPES

The 15,770 total housing units present in the Tenderloin, all fall within one of three categories: market rate units, rent “stabilized” units, and affordable units (San Francisco Department of City Planning, 2016). The defining factors between these unit types is their long-term affordability status. While ‘affordable units’ are considered permanently affordable, ‘rent stabilized units’ may be affordable for the present occupant but could shift in status with tenant turnover. These different unit types can occasionally be differentiated by the physical attributes of their building, but often times it is their internal or invisible programmatic qualities that provide the most distinction. As such, it is not always clear when walking through the neighborhood what kind of unit is contained within a building, and the level of affordability protection it provides for its occupants.

Permanently Affordable Units

There are roughly 4,000 to 5,000^2 affordable units in the Tenderloin designated as “permanently affordable” by the City, or 25-percent of the neighborhood’s total housing stock. These units include SRO units owned or operated by nonprofit groups, below market rate (BMR) units provided in new market-rate developments, 100% affordable housing development projects, and units owned by the San Francisco Housing Authority (San Francisco Department of City Planning, 2016).

Rent Stabilized Units

Over half of the housing stock in the Tenderloin is considered ‘rent stabilized’, due to the effect of either a city-wide rent control protection or an SRO conversion ordinance on the property (San Francisco Department of City Planning, 2016). In San Francisco, property owners are limited in how much they can increase the monthly rent of multi-family units constructed prior to 1979 under an existing lease agreement (City and County of San Francisco, 1979). Privately operated SRO units are subject to the 1980 SRO Conversion Ordinance, which restricted the conversion of existing SRO units into other forms of tourism or temporary rentals. In recent years, numerous loopholes for bypassing these zoning restrictions have emerged in the City, particularly through the use of legal evictions, which break the existing lease and free the building owner to increase the rent to a market rate (Varma, 2016). In the Tenderloin, an increased rate in eviction notices since 2010 illustrate the pace at which units formerly thought to be affordable are turning over to new tenants.

Market Rate Units

The remaining 20-percent of residential units in the Tenderloin are market-rate units, which includes a limited number of units built after 1979, and recently rented units commanding market-rate values (San Francisco Department of City Planning, 2016). While market-rate units make up a smaller proportion of overall housing stock in the Tenderloin, this figure does not tell the whole story of the neighborhood’s housing environment given that new development along the neighborhood’s border with Mid-Market is almost exclusively high-end luxury development.

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2 The 2016 Tenderloin Community Data Project cited 3,932 Tenderloin housing units as affordable, while the 2016 Mayor’s Affordable Rental Portfolio cited 4,919 Tenderloin units.
A Walk Through the Neighborhood

Percent of City's Affordable Housing Supply Within a Neighborhood

- **TENDERLOIN**: 29%
- **SOUTH OF MARKET**: 14%
- **WESTERN ADDITION**: 9%
- **MISSION**: 8%
- **FINANCIAL DISTRICT**: 6%

Existing Housing Types

- **Nonprofit SROs**: 24%
- **Private SROs**: 18%
- **Other Affordable Housing**: 7%
- **Rent Controlled Housing**: 51%
For outsiders, the Tenderloin is a daunting, frustrating place filled with landmines of social chaos that seem to wax and wane with no clear logic. Compared to the more rigid social norms of public life in the Financial District to the east or Nob Hill to the north, the Tenderloin is a neighborhood where many different types of activities and people intermingle freely and within quick succession. But these activities and people are not arranged randomly within the neighborhood’s public realm, nor do they always appear suddenly and without warning. Upon closer inspection of the built environment and the types of activities that occur within it, one can glean key attributes from each that serve as tools for both navigating the neighborhood and understanding how it serves the people who use it. In this way, built form and public life are akin to the signs or symbols used for reading maps. They allow outsiders and insiders alike to make sense of a neighborhood environment, and to make intentional decisions about how to best navigate it based on changes ahead.

The stage for all public life in the Tenderloin is its sidewalks. Beyond serving as infrastructure for pedestrian circulation, sidewalks are where people in the Tenderloin socialize, relax, sleep, eat, do drugs, sell drugs, listen to music, play, and retreat. In some cases, these activities are able to co-exist within the same general area, while other times they exist in parallel due to incompatibilities between them and environmental conditions that place preference for one activity over another. Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrenfeucht describe this incompatibility as a result of people’s forced use of public space when a private alternative is not a preferred or viable option.

“In public spaces, activities can directly interfere with one another, or one group’s use may disrupt another group’s vision for a space...But sidewalks are spaces for both housed and unhoused residents and should be accessible for necessary activities. Indeed, some public spaces should be available to people who do not have access to private space to sustain themselves” (Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht, 2009).

Unlike other highly residential neighborhoods in the city, the Tenderloin’s sidewalks burst with life throughout weekdays and weekends. It is a ‘homebody’ neighborhood where people appear to be consistently ‘using’ it for the vast majority of their needs, rather than leaving for other neighborhoods or cities during business hours and returning to its streets only in the evening or on weekends. As in any urban setting there is a certain level of unpredictability that is to be expected, but the Tenderloin is not based solely around unpredictability. It is a place that mostly follows its own set of norms with some predictable clusters of different neighborhood users that help to elucidate...
People gathering with belongings in tow outside St. Anthony’s before the dining room opens for lunch.

St. Anthony’s truck parks outside its building, affirming its control over the area.
broader microclimates of social and built environment conditions.

The neighborhood has a predictable rhythm as well. Before 10 AM, it is quieter—groggy even. Parents walk with children to school, and a shop owner opens the gates of his business, spooking a man nearby to roll up his bedding from the sidewalk where he spent the evening. Outside St. Anthony’s the line for breakfast is long but orderly, with some dozing on the sidewalk or slouching glumly, while others chat happily with others around them. Occasionally, a young professional wearing the uniform of Mid-Market (Patagonia jacket, earbuds, and sunglasses) strolls briskly into the street scene and towards Market Street, but their appearance seems jarring and detached, and does not fit as readily into the larger observed street rhythm.

As morning turns to mid-day, the neighborhood truly comes alive. The sidewalks along Jones and Leavenworth Streets bustle with elderly folks pushing walkers, Asian men chatting outside dry-cleaning business, a mother walking with her young daughter, women in hijabs, groups of school children walking with their teachers, and a man walking his pit-bull. Compared to Mid-Market tech employees with their sleek and trim laptop bags, Tenderloin office workers are easily identified with their bulk briefcases that seem close to bursting with papers and files as they scurry between the many social service organizations and government agencies located in the neighborhood. Occasionally, the cheerful din of the street scene is punctuated by the sounds of something more extreme: a person having some kind of mental health episode, two dogs fighting, or a nearby ambulance. But these interruptions do not necessarily detract from the quality of the public life. In some cases, they simply add another layer of texture and complexity that illustrate the neighborhood’s capacity for an abundance of different types of people and activities. Yet there are also more troubling elements of the midday Tenderloin street scene that do indeed inflict harm on the health of the community. On some blocks, groups of people sitting on the sidewalk are visibly using drugs or under the influence of a substance, and their actions can be loud, abrasive and confrontational to those who pass. A man might be seen urinating on the curb without a care, and a disheveled woman screams in the middle of the street, oblivious to the car that nearly crashed into her. In other cases, a single person sleeping on the sidewalk without shoes or a shirt shows visible signs of illness and suffering that challenge comprehension in one of the richest cities in the world. As afternoon begins to turn to evening the rise of potentially more nefarious street life activity grows. Street corners that once seemed lively but not unsafe now seem to be spaces of contention, where dozens of people, mostly men, fill the sidewalks and effectively cut off access to large sections of a block. The smell of marijuana fills the street, and the elderly and children who filled the public realm earlier in the day are no longer as visible. That the Tenderloin can be both a place of relatively healthy street life that provides for a variety of different low-income people and also a place of chronic suffering and crime speaks to the incredible plurality that defines the neighborhood. It is this plurality that also makes it an important place to observe and experience, but an incredibly difficult one to design and plan for, and even appreciate.
In the late morning and early afternoon, the Tenderloin come alive with activity as people take to the sidewalks for errands or just to socialize.
CHARACTERS OF THE TENDERLOIN’S PUBLIC REALM

Kim argues that to truly begin to understand the complex array of assertions of power within the public realm across multiple spatial and temporal scales, planners must use field study methods to assess the “everyday” in public realm urbanism: Who is on the sidewalk? Where in the city or neighborhood are they gathering? What are they doing? And when are they doing it? The following is a list of characters that make up the majority of the public street life in the neighborhood. This is not an exhaustive list of all Tenderloin resident types or users of the neighborhood, but rather those that were observed to be spending the most time out in public within the Tenderloin. One particular neighborhood demographic this public life study does not capture are the many residents who work long hours outside the neighborhood’s boundaries in various service and labor jobs.

Street Dwellers

One of the groups of people most commonly associated with the Tenderloin, street dwellers make up any type of person who does not live in a formal home. The term ‘street dweller’ is not a euphemism for ‘homeless’, however. Given that it is impossible to know by looking at someone whether they are in fact homeless, and given the fact that many people who technically have homes still use the street as a place for shelter and rest for a variety of reasons, this thesis is not concerned with classifying people as homeless. Rather, it aims to classify a type of person who appears to be using the public realm as a place to sit or lie because they have no access to other formal places to simply “be”. Street dwellers also range from those who may be without a place to stay for only few hours or a day, to those who have somehow found a way to survive on the streets for years. Some may spend their evenings in shelters, however for the majority of their day (usually between 6 AM and 6 PM), they are without a formal space to stay and may resort to sitting or sleeping on the streets of the Tenderloin. Some street dwellers do not stay in shelters, either out of preference, or because the choice has been made for them due to the limited number of total beds each shelter provides.

Another important consideration for the street dweller is the issue of belongings. Many have belongings in tow, ranging from a single bag or blanket to backpacks and carts loaded with an array of acquired possessions. Since most shelters will not permit people to bring much with them when checking in for the night, storage becomes a deeply personal and
A Walk Through the Neighborhood

Observed Public Life Activity

Streets serve as open space. Boeddeker Park is popular with children, but overall most socializing and recreation is happening on the streets.

Street dwelling concentrates around large NPOs. Street dwelling does not occur randomly, and most larger clusters align with locations of major NPOs providing critical services.

Not all corners are the same. Within 1 block, corner characteristics shift from hang-out spots for residents to more drug-oriented activity.

Observed stationary activity locations during the course of a single weekday, along with residential building entrances and facade types.
complicated problem. Particularly for those who are attempting to get off the street by finding a new job or landing an affordable rental unit, the issue of what to do with clothes, valuables, and important documents can become a logistical nightmare. At 350 Jones Street, next to Boeddeker Park, a shop-keeper attempts to remedy this issue by offering people a place to store their things for extended periods of time for free—illustrating the important and unique roles that local individuals play in keeping order within a neighborhood beyond larger government agencies or local institutional powers as alluded to in Jacobs' Life and Death of Great American Cities:

"Vital cities have marvelous innate abilities for understanding, communicating, contriving and inventing what is required to combat their difficulties" (J. Jacobs, 1961).

This organic, bottom-up action by a local Tenderloin community member to solve a problem that traditional planning systems could not is also indicative of the "everyday urbanism" described by Margaret Crawford. This type of urbanism refers to small increments of change that are heterogeneous and collective, as opposed to the more singular, wholesale new community process or plan that local or state-level planning traditionally provides. Crawford contends that planners have lost sight of the importance of the ubiquity of city spaces, in an attempt to design special spaces for special occasions:

The everyday city has rarely been the focus of attention for architects or urban designers, despite the fact that an amazing number of social, spatial, and aesthetic meanings can be found in the repeated activities and conditions that constitute our daily, weekly, and yearly routines" (Crawford, 1999).
Observed Street Dwelling Activity

Individuals scattered more on the east side. While individual street dwellers were observed throughout the study area, more were on the eastern half.

Larger clusters near large social service providers. Glide and St. Anthony's had larger clusters of street dwellers waiting for on the sidewalk.

Market Street the dividing line. No street dwelling clusters were ever observed along Market Street, and typically were at least one block away.

Observed "street dweller" gathering locations and surrounding land uses
Residents of Longer-Term Housing

This category captures anyone who appears to be comfortable moving within the neighborhood, but does not outwardly appear to be dwelling for extended periods of time on the street. While not a perfect metric, it helps to differentiate between those who are experiencing more long-term periods of street living that are likely preventing them from getting the services and care they need, and those who appear to be getting their most basic shelter, food, and hygiene needs covered. These longer-term housing residents may stand alone or cluster with others for extended periods of time on the sidewalk or in plazas, but they do not carry a large number of belongings with them, and they do not sit on the sidewalk. It includes a boisterous cluster of elderly people chatting about local gossip in front of an apartment building, elementary school children walking with their parents, a man sitting in a plastic chair under the awning of an apartment building, and a teacher leading a stream of babbling preschool children down Ellis Street. It also includes people who fall under wide range of housing statuses. Some have lived in the neighborhood for decades and have a relatively stabilized long-term living arrangement, while others are currently housed but are only one missed paycheck away from losing everything and returning to the street or the shelter system, and others still who are formerly homeless or incarcerated and receive more supportive services through their housing provider.

From my observations of the neighborhood, these people appear to be the keepers of the street scene, the referees of public space, and
Observed Longer-Term Resident Activity

**SROs drive clusters.** Clusters of longer-term residents were frequently scene outside SRO entrances.

**Corner stores not a determinant.** Some corner store sidewalks had large clusters throughout the day, while others were empty.

**SROs drive clusters.** Clusters of longer-term residents were frequently scene outside SRO entrances.

**UN Plaza highly used but in patches.** Residents typically seemed to avoid the central part of the Plaza, particularly during Off the Grid.

- **Observed "housed" resident gathering areas and Tenderloin housing types**

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- **Nonprofit-Run SRO**
- **Private-Run SRO**
- **Other Affordable Housing**
- **Rent-Controlled Housing**
- **Open Space**
- **Corner Store**
- **SRO Entrance**
- **Residential Entrance**
- **Longer-Term Resident**
they are frequent faces in front of apartment buildings, on street corners, and in line at many of the neighborhood’s social service organizations. Many of them were observed to be watching and gauging the surrounding street scene with critical awareness, constantly assessing the people they saw and responding to them accordingly—including this researcher. Some will nod hello to passersby, and they call out to people they see on the other side of the street—helping to set a tone of accountability and personal interaction that is rare in large urban contexts. Occasionally, if a resident notices something amiss, they will approach to inquire more. Several times while I stopped to take notes of something I had observed, someone would approach me to inquire about my activities. The exchanges were always polite, yet clearly demonstrated the role these neighborhood gatekeepers played in protecting the street environment from outsiders looking to do harm. In a neighborhood that is prone to occasional eccentric or even violent displays of behavior, the involved, hyper-aware actions of longer-term residents brings a calming presence to the streets they occupy, and provides a necessary level of surveillance that traditional policing cannot. As Jane Jacobs describe it,

“... the public peace—the sidewalk and street peace—of cities is not kept primarily by the police... It is kept primarily by an intricate, almost unconscious, network of voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves, and enforced by the people themselves” [J. Jacobs, 1961].

While more rowdy street life or examples of chronic homelessness and drug use are the most immediately visible or audible elements of a block, it is the longer-term, watchful residents in the background who ultimately are responsible for keeping the order of the street intact and intervening if necessary.
A Walk Through the Neighborhood

![A preschool class walking through the neighborhood](image)

Small clusters of people gathering on the street

![Small clusters of people gathering on the street](image)
Drug Dealers and Users

Drugs and the people who sell and who use them play an important role in the Tenderloin street scene. For this study, I categorized people as participating in drug activity if I observed them using drugs, or if they appeared to have visible signs of intoxication. As such, I did not include people sleeping on the sidewalk in the drug category if they did not clearly exhibit signs of intoxication or drug paraphernalia.

In terms of drug selling, this was a more difficult determination and my results are admittedly biased and not a perfect snapshot of how drugs are distributed within the neighborhood. Regardless, after spending a few days in the neighborhood and talking with locals, I began to notice certain types of clusters of people that were distinctly different from the locals described above. While clusters of locals tended to locate around residential uses, these other clusters tended to occur around commercial properties that looked vacant or closed. In some cases, these groups did cluster in front of residential buildings, but again there was a distinct difference in their occupation of the space compared to the clusters of locals. While locals tended to congregate up against their building wall, ensuring that pedestrian traffic could move easily past, this other type of cluster did just the opposite. Instead, they would crowd the sidewalk, asserting a confrontational sort of dominance that immediately sent a message to pedestrians that this space was spoken for. These clusters also tended to be quite large, ranging from ten to over 30 people, with many spilling off the sidewalk and into the street.

Another key indicator used to determine whether clustering was related to drug dealing was the presence of a parked car near the cluster that seemed to be contributing to the cluster's activities. Although street parking in the Tenderloin is ubiquitous and nearly every street appeared to be filled with parked cars throughout the day, I rarely saw people entering or exiting these parked cars to visit nearby shops or residences. Instead, despite the presence of parking meters on all of the neighborhood’s streets that restrict parking from 6 AM to 7 PM and charge up to $3 dollars an hour for up to 4 hours of parking at a time. And yet despite these onerous parking restrictions, the cars seemed to exist as street ornaments, like trees or planters, that characterized the streetscape but did not illicit much interaction with people and are largely stationary. By comparison, the presumed drug-related clusters nearly always included a parked car or two with drivers and passengers inside who people in the cluster would gather around and converse with.
Observed Drug Dealer and User Activity

Corners as territory. Some corners appeared to be held as territory for different groups, and featured the same group of people throughout the day and week.

Social Service Locations Not Indication of Drug Activity. Overall, locations of observed drug use did not seem to be related to locations of social service providers.

Hyde Street as a drug hub. This section of Hyde Street featured high levels of drug use and sale throughout the day, but fell off quickly once leaving the block.

Observed drug-related activity and location of critical social service providers
Social Service Providers

Given the abundance of social service organizations that occupy the neighborhood, the workers and volunteers who run their day-to-day and often very hands-on operations make up a highly visible group within the Tenderloin’s public realm. Identified by their t-shirts or jackets emblazoned with the name of the organization they serve, these people are frequent fixtures in the neighborhood, particularly during the daytime. These publicly visible service providers generally fall within one of three categories. There are those who work in more full-time positions at large institutions with fixed operating schedules and well-established spatial domains in the neighborhood. Workers at St. Anthony’s dining hall and Glide fall into this category. They provide a continued presence out in front of the facilities, serving as part concierge, part security team. Often with minimal vocalization or action, they help to keep crowds of people waiting to be served meals calm and comfortable, while at the same they assert an air of authority over the sidewalks immediately surrounding the organization’s facility. They are the peacekeepers, the authority figures, and the ultimate deciders of who can occupy space. In one instance, I witnessed a St. Anthony’s employee intervene between two people in some sort of an altercation, one of whom was becoming increasingly violent and belligerent. Immediately sensing the potential this person had to disrupt the balance of the street, the St. Anthony’s employee jumped into action, grabbed a chair and physically forced the violent person to take a seat away from the larger crowd of patrons. I never observed law enforcement in these areas, perhaps an indication that on the blocks with major social service institutions, policing is better left to the most local of authorities.

The second category of social service provider observed in the Tenderloin’s public realm includes those that provide more mobile forms of service, and are not rooted to their locations the way some of the major institutions are. Organizations that fall into this category include Lava Mae, a nonprofit that operates a fleet of mobile showers and bathrooms, and the Pit Stop, a fleet of toilet-only stations that is orchestrated by the Department of Public Works. In both cases, the mobile units are parked in the street and prospective users wait in line on the adjacent sidewalk. The workers manning these mobile hygiene stations perform similar functions as their counterparts in the more stationary service provider category, but they do not assert the same magnitude of claim to the surrounding sidewalk. While they were observed to largely command a sense of calm and order to the area immediately around their stations, they did not exhibit the capacity to disrupt or prevent behaviors like their counterparts in the St. Anthony’s example.

The third category of social service provider observed out in the Tenderloin is the most transient and mobile of the three. It includes San Francisco City Impact, and Youth with a Mission (YWAM), two deeply faith-based, volunteer organizations that recruit upper-middle class youth and young adults to walk the streets of the neighborhood and meet with street dwellers and other locals face-to-face to talk about Christianity. Some of their volunteers pay to participate with the organization through a “mission program”
Large clusters at service provider home base. Large groups of volunteers mostly scene clustered near service provider locations.

Not an equal distribution. Most observations of providers in the public realm were on the eastern half of the study area.

Observed "social service affiliates" and corresponding land use locations
and travel to the Tenderloin from around the country. From afar, they could be mistaken for any type of community service organization or a summer camp; participants don matching neon vests or t-shirts, and some carry brooms, trash bags, or paper bags of free lunches to hand out. Compared to the way in which the other category of service groups occupies the public realm in the Tenderloin, volunteers with the faith-based organizations appear decidedly less aware of their surroundings and less capable of serving as referees or moderators of the street’s activities. With a team of mostly outsiders, many of whom come from places and socioeconomic levels many times removed from the Tenderloin, most have little claim to the neighborhood and are not fully ingrained in its intricacies. As such, they tended to roam through the neighborhood in large clusters that were easily identifiable and wholly separate from other street life. These groups often drew considerable amounts of attention to themselves, and in some cases, their presence appeared to disrupt the flow of the street altogether, such as when a gang of twenty-five middle-school aged youth gathered around a cluster of street dwellers as a sort of orientation to the neighborhood put on by YWAM. While some of the surrounded street dwellers appeared to engage with the out of town gawkers, others seemed less enthused, or simply resigned to their status as figurative zoo animals.

Both of these faith-based organizations also have brick and mortar locations, however unlike the religious facilities of St. Boniface or Glide which bring thousands of people into their premises, the City Impact and YWAM facilities are not as readily available to the public and tend to serve mainly as office and volunteer staging areas when they are not being used for worship services. These types of service organizations were observed as distinctly different from the others in that they appeared to approach the mission of their work with a more selective lens, and saw their role in the community as both a provider of physical services and spiritual services. In observing the interactions between the faith-based volunteers and those they encountered on the street, I noticed several scenarios where free food provided by the volunteer was withheld from the street dweller or Tenderloin local until making sort of commitment to the Christian values of the volunteer. San Francisco City Impact, was one organization in particular that stood out with its daily weekday barbeque event in a parking lot next to the organization’s Taylor Street location. As the scent of sizzling barbeque wafted out into the street, a handful of fresh-faced twenty-somethings guarded the entrance to the parking lot and explained to prospective attendees that the barbeque was free for anyone to attend so long as they participated in a prayer service and stayed within the facilities until 4 PM. Those who wanted to leave early would have to pay one dollar. This effective entrapment of vulnerable people without cash to spare, resulted in an entirely different declaration of power over the public realm not typically observed elsewhere in the Tenderloin and generally seemed incongruous with the observed spirit of the neighborhood.
A Walk Through the Neighborhood

Visiting groups of teenagers roam the neighborhood handing out free lunches on behalf of local faith-based NPOs.

Crowd control for Glide’s lunchtime session with a line that stretches around the block.
Tourists

Of all these high-frequency public realm users of the Tenderloin, the tourist is the easiest to spot. The high-end cameras around their necks, practical walking shoes, and occasional roller suitcase are obvious giveaways, but it is also their look of perplexed horror at the scenes unfolding around them that cement their tourist designation. The Tenderloin’s proximity to BART, tourist hotels and hostels, and major tourist attractions like Union Square and Powell Street make for an inevitable and constant supply of tourists filtering through the neighborhood. Given the consistent grid of the neighborhood’s urban form and the quick transition between the Tenderloin and Union Square, it is easy to drift into the Tenderloin unintentionally. In observations of tourists that fall into this category, many are seen standing at corners, glancing at street signs and then looking back at their phones. These are the tourists who appear out of control within their surroundings and make little to no claim to the public realm. In some cases when some more visibly vulnerable street dwellers or drug users were situated along the sidewalks of an intersection, tourists were observed standing in the street while waiting for the light to change, creating as much distance as possible between themselves and the original occupants of the sidewalk.

As one moves further out of the core of the Tenderloin and towards Union Square or Market Street, the size of tourist groups increase, as do the rights they assert for themselves on the street. Along the sidewalks that front the Hilton Hotel, a gaggle of twenty to thirty convention types were consistently observed gathering for fresh air and conversation throughout the course of the day, presumably during a break between conference sessions based on the laminated name tags draped around their necks. This particular cluster outside the Hilton Hotel is a block away from Glide Memorial Church, and slightly uphill. From their perch looking down Taylor Street, the outlines of two street dwellers lying against the wall of Glide were clearly visible, yet there appeared to be a collective ease amongst the convention tourists that the sidewalk they claimed outside the Hilton was in no jeopardy. Compared to the tourists observed in the core of the Tenderloin, these Hilton Hotel patrons appeared to feel completely in control of their surroundings, perhaps given the foreboding, fortress-like structure of the hotel that cast a powerful tone of corporate control across the entire block.
A Walk Through the Neighborhood

Observed Tourist Activity

Institutional uses drew the largest clusters. Unsurprisingly, the larger institutional uses in Civic Center and the Hilton Hotel drew large clusters of tourists.

Isolated tourists in the core. Some individuals or pairs were occasionally spotted in the core of the neighborhood, but did not appear to be there intentionally.

Tenderloin not yet a major tourist destination. Despite recent attempts to attract tourists, such as the Tenderloin Museum, few large groups were spotted in the core of the neighborhood.

Observed "tourists" gathering locations and institutional or gentrified facades
Chapter 2

Tech Employees

The final category of user of the Tenderloin public realm is the tech employee, a group that carries tremendous connotations in San Francisco, and for many is intrinsically linked with gentrification and the displacement of low-income people across the city. Public relations missteps and embarrassing snafus by tech companies often become popular fodder for San Franciscans, such as the ongoing woes of Uber’s embattled CEO, Travis Kalanick, or the tale of the Google commuter shuttle bus that became stuck navigating a steep hill in the Mission, effectively trapping itself like a beached whale. In this regard, the companies and their employees are often painted as the aloof yet nefarious villains, descending upon low-income yet culturally rich neighborhoods like the Mission and Western Addition without demonstrating any cultural literacy or general self-awareness for the communities they co-locate with. “Tech worker” is also an amorphous term that engenders strong reactions from many but is hard to succinctly describe in a way that accurately captures the complexity of its population.

Of course, not all tech workers are twenty-something millionaires, and many do not even reside in San Francisco given the high cost of living and limited housing stock for the middle class. These distinctions aside, there are certain attributes of the younger, millennial office worker that are apparent when observing the Tenderloin, and a pattern of use, movement and spatial relationships becomes apparent upon further study. These workers generally do not frequent the Tenderloin in large numbers—with the one key exception being groups of employees from some of the Tax Break companies which do send large groups of their employees to volunteer in the Tenderloin.

For the purposes of this thesis, “tech worker” encompasses any person observed to be wearing higher end brands, headphones, a laptop bag or briefcase, and any apparel with tech company logos or names affixed to it. This definition is not a complete portrait of tech workers, and admittedly leaves many out and includes others who do not work in tech, however it reflects a set of shared values that are commonly ascribed to a new gentrifying class in San Francisco, and are easily broadcast to the people they pass on the street. These broadcasted values signal that they are both of a different world, and not interested in connecting with the one they are currently traveling through. One long-time resident described his experiences with this group of people to me as such:

“These people, they’re walking through the neighborhood, they look straight ahead, they won’t acknowledge you, it’s really kind of weird. ...we occupy the same space, but they’re living in some kind of different dimension.”

Overall, this study yielded few observations of people lingering in the Tenderloin who met this “tech worker” description. While some did walk through the neighborhood, few stopped to spend time in the neighborhood. The vast majority of tech workers were seen lingering closer to Market Street, and in United Nations Plaza where a cluster of food trucks operated for lunch time.
Observed tech employee activity

Tech territory well-defined. Clusters of presumed tech employees largely clustered in key areas where they could exhibit control over the area: Off the Grid, the plaza area outside Twitter's office, and in outdoor dining areas attached to restaurants.

Little observed mixing between street dweller and tech employee. These two groups largely steered clear of one another, with the greater UN Plaza being the one exception.

Observed "tech employee" gathering locations in relation to observed "street dwellers" and gentrified facades.
THE TENDERLOIN’S BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Based on the observational analysis of different types of users of the Tenderloin’s public space, there are key attributes of the built environment that help to predict where these different types of people might congregate or occupy space. The following built form typologies encompass both programmatic and physical building attributes that combine to create narratives for blocks and streets.

SRO Façade

These are the most iconic structures in the neighborhood with signage and distinct facades that line the street like monuments. Each building stands as a unique object with ornate detailing, intricate brick work, and vintage signage that distinguish it from next-door neighbors. As a collection of buildings, the SROs of a single block often create memorable street scenes that help to differentiate one block from another. In some cases, these SROs also help to break up the pockets of more monotonous physical density in the neighborhood due to a lack of open spaces and setbacks. SROs are located throughout the Tenderloin, but they are particularly populous on the northernmost east-west streets in the study area (O’Farrell, Ellis, Eddy, and Turk). Eddy in particular features 21 different SROs with colorful names that evoke images of stature and prominence: Empress, Ritz, Windsor and Cadillac.

Ellis, Eddy, and Turk Streets were also three of the streets with the highest number of Tenderloin locals lingering and socializing on their sidewalks. As some of the smallest living units legally available for rent in the city, the sidewalk outside of SRO building entrances becomes a valuable open space resource. It is also a venue that allows for maximum socializing opportunities. Due to their design, SROs are largely occupied by single people, and as such can be isolating and lonely living arrangements. Given the density of these buildings however, some with over 100 units, by hanging out near the entrance of the building one is guaranteed to encounter numerous neighbors either from the same building or other nearby apartments.

This ability of the SRO, through its design, to bring people out to the street helps create an environment that more people want to watch. As Jacobs describes it, the presence of people actively engaging in street watching is in part a factor of the vibrancy of a street itself,

“Nobody enjoys sitting on a stoop or looking out a window at an empty street. Almost nobody does such a thing. Large numbers of people entertain themselves, off and on, by watching street activity” (J. Jacobs, 1961).

While there did not appear to be a noticeable difference between the amount of gathering by locals outside of nonprofit SROs versus the private SROs, however the occurrences of street dwellers did appear to correlate with SRO type. Generally, the sidewalks around the nonprofit SRO entrances were not used by street dwellers, which could be related to the types of security measures that the nonprofits follow for these buildings, or it could also be related to the buildings’ generally higher levels of upkeep and appearance. Overall, the facades
of nonprofit-operated SROs appeared better maintained than their private counterparts, and their lobby areas tend to be highly visible and open to the street.

Overall, SRO buildings were not particularly close to any designated forms of open space, namely Boeddeker Park, the Tenderloin Children's Playground, the Turk and Hyde Mini Park, Sergeant John MacCaulay Park, and Civic Center Plaza. The centrally located Boeddeker Park serves the most SROs of the four, but the park sits at one of the few intersections in the core of the neighborhood that does not have a single SRO on its corner. Additionally, most of these parks, save for Civic Center Plaza, are playgrounds that are intended for children and the elderly. Single adults, particularly men, looking for some fresh air and open space would likely not receive a warm welcome if they strolled into one of these playgrounds. This reality compounds the importance of sidewalk space as public realm for SRO dwellers, particularly those with limited mobility, and it highlights the voids that formalized park making by the City has left in the neighborhood's larger open space network.
Ambiguous Façade

While the vibrant and character-laden SRO buildings create memorable street scenes in the Tenderloin, they are counter-balanced by an equal number of vacant, boarded up, or simply opaque façades that exude an impersonal and sometimes dreary character. Altogether, these façade types exhibit an ambiguous quality that prevents a passerby from fully understanding what and who the interior spaces are for, and conversely, who has the right to claim the abutting public realm. In using Jane Jacobs’ ‘eyes on the street’ logic (J. Jacobs, 1961), these facades are blind to whatever occurs near them.

In the core section of the Tenderloin, stretches of ambiguous façade are more intermittent and brief. They include vacant retail storefronts with boarded up windows, and smaller, ground floor personal service or office units with security gates that did not appear to move throughout the week. On some blocks, these façade types are so common that walking down the block feels like walking through the skeleton of an old neighborhood with remnants of ground floor shop life that once was. Some of these ground floor units are clearly vacant with ‘for lease’ signs in windows, while others appear to be in some kind of use but their purpose is unclear and they are shuttered from public view. However, they are quickly joined by the entrances to apartment buildings or more vibrant façade types that reanimate the street.

Closer to the edges of the study area, the frequency of the ambiguous façade increases from an intermittent storefront or two to an entire building or entire block that offer limited pedestrian scale and access. Over on Eddy and Larkin Streets a massive hulk of a building formerly used by the Pacific Gas and Electric Company occupies a full block with no window or street access in sight, while on Market Street the triangular north side blocks turn their back on the Tenderloin with windowless and parking lots. However, the ‘ambiguous façade’ includes other types of buildings that are not derelict or vacant, but are instead either blank or lack transparency elements that allow pedestrians to understand what occurs beyond their walls, such as the institutional government and art buildings of Civic Center, and the Hilton Hotel on the northeastern edge of the Tenderloin.

By observing the street life occurring alongside these ambiguous facades, one can begin to make distinctions between their uses and the power they exude. The sidewalks around the institutional and tourist hotel buildings did not typically attract any sidewalk dwellers or drug activity. While these buildings did not appear to have heavy security presences, they did appear to attract high levels of tourists and other professional types. One exception to this rule was the Public Library on Grove Street, which serves as a mainstay for the homeless with its public bathrooms, indoor seating areas, and electrical outlets. Its Grove and Larkin Streets sides in particular were consistently claimed by street dwellers and people in various states of intoxicant and mental health episodes.

In contrast, the ambiguous ground floor units located more internally within the Tenderloin appeared to provide ideal backdrops for street dwelling and drug use. Along these sidewalks, there is no omnipresent building owner or tenant to regulate deviant forms of
sidewalk lingering, and drug activity can carry on without prying eyes. The use of sidewalks along ambiguous facades was further confirmed by various pieces of signage posted on the buildings that stated drug use and sale was prohibited. [photo] Although technically illegal in San Francisco due to a 2010 voter approved ordinance (insert reference) sitting and sleeping on the streets of the Tenderloin is generally permitted, with some important caveats. Sidewalks near schools or youth centers are typically kept free of any sitting or sleeping during business hours due to concerted efforts by both local law enforcement and property owners.

These findings indicate that the overall program of a building plays an important role in where and how people use the public realm around it. However, it is unclear whether the program itself is what drives people to use space around buildings differently, or whether the form of the building alerts people to the types of programs within.
Social Service Center

The ground floor social service use is a dominant character in the Tenderloin street scene environment. They are sometimes clustered together, such as on Golden Gate Avenue where nearly every ground floor includes a social or community service of some kind. In the core of the Tenderloin studied for this thesis, virtually every block has at least one ground floor social service use, and most have many more. Some services are housed within the ground floor units of SRO buildings, which can make them harder to discern from the street and likely imperceptible to the casual passerby. Other ground floor social service uses are much more prominently displayed. Their facades feature mounted signage and promotional banners or posters hang in their windows. Some of these units appear to be used more for office work, or private client meetings, and such their window blinds were often drawn. In other cases, like at St. Anthony’s Dining Hall, the function of the ground floor unit as an active and open space for the public was readily visible from the street.

Most of the biggest observed clusters of street dwelling in the Tenderloin were located near the two major providers of free meals in the neighborhood, as well as the City’s Public Library. St. Anthony’s dining room at the corner of Golden Gate Avenue and Jones Street, and Glide Memorial Church at the corner of Ellis and Taylor Street, serve 2,000 meals each between 8 AM to 5:30 PM. Both locations featured dozens of people sitting in line, as well as many others in smaller groups scattered within a block length of the actual facility. While many who come to receive free meals from these two locations are not homeless, the vast majority waiting outside between meal times, particularly in the late morning and late afternoon when the time until the next meal is greater, appear to be street dwellers given that they are sitting on the sidewalk waiting for services with belongings in tow. This high volume of extended sidewalk occupation by street dwellers did not appear to exist elsewhere in the neighborhood, even in front of other types of large institutional service providers like Larkin Street Youth Services, the Salvation Army, or even St. Anthony’s second location further west on Golden Gate Avenue. This finding illustrates the power that building program has on activity within the public realms, and that the presence of certain institutional bodies change the definition of what constitutes legitimate use of public space as well.
Institutions range from the old to very new, and also come in a range of sizes.
Gentrified Ground Floor

The tech company fortresses along Market Street offer clear indication of gentrification within the Mid-Market corridor with retail units that feature large plate glass windows, quirky typeset logos, and niche services that include custom-made classic road bicycles, chai tea bars, old-timey barber shops, and bars serving local microbrewery beers. In comparison to the adjacent stores selling discounted luggage, pre-paid cellphones, and check-cashing services, the gentrified storefront is easy to pick out within the larger street scene. Some gentrified ground floor units along Market Street also betray their higher-end office tenants with visibly placed security guards, cameras, and minimalist logos on the buildings’ directory signs. Gentrified building facades along Market Street also tend to feature newer streetscape installations including pavers, bicycle racks, and docking stations for the Bay Area Bike Share system.

In the Tenderloin, while these types of large-scale gentrified ground floors do not exist, there are several examples of smaller infiltrations of gentrified uses. These types of uses share an aesthetic found in many of the new Market Street uses, particularly with regards to typography choices and materials like exposed wood beams, mason jars, and other “hipster” design elements. Examples of these Tenderloin-based gentrified uses include a new high-end Japanese spa and restaurant, a boutique candy shop called Hooker’s, and the Black Cat, a newer bar serving $14 dollar cocktails.
Centrified building facades include sleek materials and lines, large amounts of glass, and stylized typography.
While Market Street is dominated by a line of “tech fortresses”, the Tenderloin exhibits a fortress typology of its own: The Nonprofit Service Center. These buildings are easy to spot, in part because they are some of the only examples of recent construction in the neighborhood. They are also typically stamped with building signs declaring their presence, and their windows are frequently filled with posters advertising various community and social service events or programs. In 2017, there are approximately 86 different entities operating in the core area of the Tenderloin alone, providing services for homelessness, supportive and affordable housing, drug treatment, mental health, social work, AIDS treatment, family and youth services, and/or job training. Some came to the neighborhood over 40 years ago when it was battling high-end real estate developers from Union Square, an AIDS epidemic, and rampant drug and violent crime rates. Yet, there are also smaller social service operations in the Tenderloin that arrived on the scene more recently in response to recent demographic displacement and gentrification issues gripping San Francisco. Altogether, these different social service entities are a dominating presence in the neighborhood, both physically and economically. They control nearly 50% percent of the total parcel area in the core Tenderloin area, either by way of property ownership, or through leases, many of them long-term. Through field study measures and business address data obtained from the City of San Francisco, I catalogued the location of every building and parcel in the Tenderloin where nonprofit or social service programming appeared to be one of the primary uses within the building. Nonprofit housing providers have a particularly large footprint in the neighborhood as well, controlling nearly 20 percent of all housing units in the neighborhood [San Francisco Department of City Planning, 2016]. In some cases, these nonprofit housing providers also act as a quasi-public housing agency by contracting with the City to house some of San Francisco’s most vulnerable residents. As part of the Care Not Cash Initiative, the Tenderloin Housing Clinic contracted with the City to house formerly homeless single adults at 15 of the organization’s SRO locations for five years, in exchange for up to $82.3 million dollars [City and County of San Francisco, 2010].

The sheer magnitude of both daily and long-term operations that these organizations oversee is comparable to a mini-city. Two of the long-time stalwarts of the neighborhood, St. Anthony’s and Glide Memorial Church, each serve over 2,000 meals a day and operate health centers, counseling services, and job training. Given the high rate of residents living in the Tenderloin in SROs without kitchens, these two mega-meal-providers are serving populations that extend beyond the homeless.

Some of these organizations have made particularly long-term investments in the Tenderloin, suggesting that their omnipresence is unlikely to change in the near future. In 2014, the St. Anthony Foundation partnered with Mercy Housing to open a second facility in the Tenderloin—a brand new, 10-story, 90-unit, mixed-use social service emporium with an expansive ground floor dining area, industrial kitchen, medical facilities, and other social service spaces [St. Anthony’s Foundation,
Glide Memorial Church makes its presence known with bright awnings, which provide shade for the people waiting in line to receive food.

Two Mercy Housing projects face off along Golden Gate Avenue.
2014). The development was made possible through over $22 million dollars in donations to the St. Anthony Foundation, and it is by far the most substantial new development in the Tenderloin within the last 10 years. Like St. Anthony’s, Glide Memorial Church also has multiple property holdings in the neighborhood, which besides the church itself includes an adjacent multi-family housing building and two other structures a block away on Mason Street for a combined total of 150 units. As major real estate holders and affordable housing providers, these organizations are a far cry from simple ‘soup kitchens’.

When considering all of the properties owned or operated full-time by nonprofits, affordable housing providers and other social service agencies, the footprint of their occupation in the Tenderloin is substantial. Much like the height and SRO conversion restrictions that govern the neighborhood, the widespread control of Tenderloin property by nonprofit organizations further restricts the amount of land in the neighborhood that could be converted to more market-rate, for-profit uses. As the Tenderloin continues to brace itself against redevelopment forces on its southern, Market Street border, the limited, patchwork pattern of available land to be developed has helped to slow the pace at which whole-sale gentrification of the Tenderloin occurs, but it is not an impenetrable armor. Today, gentrification is not always equated with large-scale, mega projects that require complete clearance of an entire block, such as the Hilton Hotel. Instead, through more innovative and flexible techniques fostered by the tactical urbanism movement, new development can infiltrate at the smallest of scales, and potentially lay the groundwork for future gentrification.
A Walk Through the Neighborhood

Parcels Controlled by Nonprofit Organizations
OBSERVED EXAMPLES OF TACTICAL URBANISM

Recent changes in the urban design condition of the Tenderloin are not exclusively encompassed by traditional forms of development. Smaller, temporary, and in some cases, more mobile, urban design interventions also characterize the urban condition of the Tenderloin, and provide key insights into how both the neighborhood and the areas around it are changing. Tactical urbanism is an increasingly common strategy used by both the public and private sectors of San Francisco to test ideas before committing large sums of investment. Although traditionally associated with more gentrified neighborhood design ideals, tactical urbanism examples observed in the Tenderloin in 2017 illustrate its ability to serve as a flexible tool that is capable of meeting the needs of a wide range of socioeconomic groups and urban conditions.

United Nations Plaza: A Social Mixing Laboratory

United Nations Plaza sits at the intersection of the Tenderloin, Mid-Market and Civic Center, beginning with a pedestrianized section of Fulton Street that runs through a canyon-like void created by the stately San Francisco Federal Building and the taller, featureless rear side of the Orpheum Theatre. At the center of the plaza, the buildings give way to a sweeping open space that runs along Market Street to its intersection with Seventh Street. The plaza includes two below-ground transit station entrances, a semi-functional Lawrence Halperin-designed fountain and sculpture, and such a vast quantity of exposed open space that standing in its center feels akin to standing inside a fishbowl. Along its edges however, there are ample ledges, steps, unused doorways, and ambiguous street walls that street dwellers and people engaging in drug activities occupy throughout the day. The Plaza can be an eerily quiet place for an urban space of its size, and it can also be a boisterous place with a cacophony of different voices—many speaking in languages other than English. For decades, the Plaza has served as a black eye for the City in its fight against homelessness and drug abuse, and has attracted the attention of the highest levels of City government. In defending the use of aggressive harassment tactics in 1983 by the San Francisco Police Department to clear homeless people out of the Plaza, a former executive director of a Market Street beautification program pointed to the top of the City’s political pyramid, “Mayor Feinstein looks out on this plaza from her office window and she’s irritated by the element she sees there.” To an extent, this sentiment towards the Plaza continues today. While many of Mid-Market’s blocks are transitioning rapidly into a higher-end aesthetic, UN Plaza has been slow to relinquish its long-time status as a haven for those with nowhere else to go. The result is a space that exhibits some of the highest levels of social mixing observed in this study, and a helpful illustration of the conflict created by a gentrifying Mid-Market and a defiant Tenderloin.

Today, the plaza’s excess of under-programmed space has given way to several different policy and design interventions to increase the demographic range of its users. A small crafts market operates for most of the day on the weekdays, and at lunchtime a fleet of food
United Nations Plaza, with City Hall in the distance, in quiet and empty in the morning.

In the evening, police arrive to break up a large group gathering by the Civic Center transit station entrance.
trucks, known as 'Off the Grid', is popular with local office workers, tourists, and millennials. These newer, temporary activations in the plaza provide new commercially oriented incentives for people to use more of the excess open space, but they are not universally appealing uses, particularly Off the Grid which targets only those able to spend at least ten dollars on their lunch. In observing the plaza both before, during, and after Off the Grid’s lunchtime programming, the spatial patterns created by a variety of plaza users helped to illustrate the larger socioeconomic divides that higher-end spatial activation perpetuates.

In the morning hours, the Plaza is quiet and subdued. A handful of professionally dressed people walk through the plaza towards the government buildings to the west, while half a dozen human-sized mounds of blankets and sleeping bags rest atop landscaping planters and along the edges of buildings surrounding the plaza. By the Market and Seventh Streets intersection, the scene is livelier. A growing number of both locals and drug users begin to congregate, while a police car parked in the plaza watches from nearby. Throughout the day, the local, potentially drug-involved groups occupying this space never relinquish their control. Every so often, when their numbers swell to a certain threshold, the watchful police car will cruise slowly through the corner of the plaza, breaking up the crowds like a sheep dog, before circling back to its post.

As lunchtime approaches, the food trucks begin to arrive and park in a circular ring in the center of the plaza. Some small tents and chairs are placed in the middle of the ring, dramatically increasing the number of formal seating options in the plaza from zero to several dozen. Throughout the lunchtime period of operation, these food trucks draw a consistent crowd of tech workers, younger twenty-somethings, tourists, and other nearby office workers from surrounding government buildings. They stay mainly in the central sub area created for the food trucks, while the surrounding planters and sculptural fountain remain occupied by various street dwellers, drug users, and anyone else who cannot or chooses not to participate in the food truck programming.

Off the Grid presents a helpful illustration of how conventional activation efforts today, like food trucks, are inadequate tools for creating more usable urban spaces that work for all people at once. Particularly when aligned with commercial activities, the cost to participate becomes a structural barrier that is no different than a highway constructed between a low-income neighborhood and higher-income neighborhood.

Another telling form of City-initiated tactical urbanism in UN Plaza is 'Sound Commons', a temporary but fixed installation which offers people different ways to create sound while engaging with friends and strangers alike in the Plaza. Installed in 2016 as part of the City’s Living Innovation Zone program, it includes various ‘stations’ of exploration where people can play a supersized xylophone or chimes, talk into cylindrical “echo tubes” that transport conversations between two people standing 100 feet apart; or try to walk along a bed of rocks with randomly placed microphones while keeping the decibel levels as low as possible. Low-income and at-risk youth and-
Lunchtime at Off the Grid in UN Plaza brings millennial tech employees in close proximity with people sleeping in public in drug-induced stupors.
adults are paid to staff the stations throughout the day, serving as "docents" that can both answer questions about the installations, and also presumably serve as the human face of a neighborhood that is largely associated with drugs and violence.

Compared to the price barrier presented by Off the Grid, the Sound Commons costs nothing and did not appear to create a distinct divide between users and non-users. However, it also did not appear to generate a huge number of users overall. In observations throughout a single weekday, only a handful of people were observed using the chimes and xylophone or walking through the rock pit, and most appeared to be tourists with cameras around their necks and daypacks. Although the docents working at the Sound Commons had relatively few opportunities to engage with strangers participating in the activations as intended by the program goals, they were frequently joined by friends or acquaintances, sometimes for hours at a time. While these social encounters never seem to result in the use of the activation stations themselves, these observations indicate that empowering people to feel in control of a space can spur a variety of different social results, regardless of what the more formal design intervention is.

The Sound Commons also raises questions about the greater purpose of public realm activations designed to create more 'democratic use of space' in contexts where the public realm is already highly activated by certain uses (i.e. homelessness, drug use, and simple acts of just "being"). In blending Nancy’s Frasers theory of ‘multiple publics’ with Jürgen Habermas’ ‘idealized bourgeois public sphere’, Margaret Crawford contends that “no single physical environment can represent a completely inclusive space of democracy”. In assigning new purpose to UN Plaza’s public realm, planners sought to attract new users to UN Plaza at the expense of its existing ones.
A portion of the Sound Commons installation, where users can play large instruments such as the set of chimes above.

Acquaintances of the Sound Commons steward use the installation as a place to socialize.
Streets for People (and Showers)

On Mondays and Thursdays, a glossy, bright blue trailer sits parked at the corner of Jones Street and Golden Gate Avenue, across from St. Anthony’s dining hall. Around it, as many as a dozen people of all different ages, genders, and ethnicities sit or stand calmly along the adjacent sidewalk, some clutching to belongings or a small bag of toiletries. Some talk or joke with each other, while others stay more to themselves. It appears to be a generally congenial, non-confrontational atmosphere, curated in part by two attendants wearing matching shirts emblazoned with a cheerful blue icon of a water droplet. This is Lava Mae, a local nonprofit that in 2015 repurposed an old San Francisco Municipal Transit bus into a high-end, mobile hygiene station complete with bathrooms, a shower, and dressing area [quote]. After a four-hour shift, the hygiene station is packed up, the street turns to its original condition, and its users go off on their way—ostensibly in a better place, both physically and mentally, to face the next challenge of their day.

The goal of Lava Mae is elegantly simple: help people experiencing homelessness achieve a hygiene standard that existing shelters and city facilities are unable to provide. And yet, it is the first in San Francisco to use mobile infrastructure for bringing hygiene services to the masses. Using water from fire hydrants and parking in the street, Lave Mae offers an alternative example of what is possible within the public realm when space is reclaimed from cars for people, and it demonstrates that there is room in the built environment for tactical urbanism interventions that do not possess gentrification-inducing qualities. By harnessing small scraps of the public realm not currently used to its highest potential, such as fire-hydrant zones, Lava Mae offers a helpful clue into the role of small-scale planning interventions within a landscape that is dominated by larger scale forms and systems. Despite its lack of brick and mortar, the mobile hygiene station dramatically transforms the utility of public space, and makes visual many of the most visceral and human conditions of homelessness for all to see. In a Silicon Valley context, where innovations like 400-dollar internet-powered juicers and autonomous sidewalk delivery vehicles aim to fix societal problems that are debatable at best, Lava Mae offers a decidedly low-tech solution to a known and pervasive societal problem. It also accomplishes a different kind of social mixing within the public realm that puts low-income people first. While the Hall introduces new uses for higher-income users in a low-income context, and Sound Commons takes a more neutral approach with its free and non-specific user-oriented installation, Lava Mae is an urban transformation that is geared specifically to the needs of the marginally housed. Its occupation of the public realm naturally creates opportunities for social mixing between groups, but not at the expense of those it is most concerned with serving.

Lava Mae is not the only example of tactical urbanism targeting low-income populations in the Tenderloin. In 2014 the City’s Department of Public Works began its own mobile bathroom unit, called the Pit Stop (Lee Romney, 2015). A no-frills version compared to Lava Mae’s, Pit Stop’s units are simple mobile toilets operated daily outside the Public Library at Grove Street, at the intersection of Hyde and
A Walk Through the Neighborhood

Turk, and on Ellis Street across from Glide Memorial Church. Pit Stop station hours start in the afternoon and extend into the evening when dining facilities like Glide Memorial and St. Anthony’s have closed for the day, and they are staffed by a recurring set of employees that bring a familiar face to the block. While the Pit Stop station at the Public Library appears to serve as an intentional maneuver to divert street dwellers from using the Library’s public restroom, the station at Hyde and Turk Streets functions more like a social activation instrument. Throughout the day, locals and presumed street dwellers alike were observed chatting with the station operator, who himself had become a fixture in the Tenderloin street ballet. Both the nonprofit Lava made model and the city-operated Pit Stop model illustrate the impact that introducing local, Tenderloin-specific amenities into the public realm can have on the tone and productive quality of the street scene.
CONCLUSIONS ON THE TENDERLOIN’S OBSERVED BUILT AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS

By using the qualitative methods described at the start of this chapter to explore and question the physical and social conditions of the Tenderloin, I was able to focus on a set of key neighborhood qualities that would have otherwise been largely imperceptible to an outside observer, and extensive walks and public life observations throughout the neighborhood over a two-week period allowed me to slowly immerse myself into the rhythms of the neighborhood that traditional GIS or archival research methods could not have allowed. By both walking the neighborhood streets for myself, and interviewing locals who have walked the Tenderloin’s streets for decades, I was often able to make more personal connections with the insights from interviewees shared. Hearing from locals about the role of neighborhood landmarks, major social institutions, and certain street activities like the drug dealing on Hyde Street, became more tangible social and spatial concepts when I was able to observe these spaces for myself. Spending an extended and concentrated period of time in the Tenderloin (roughly 10 hours each day over two separate weeks) also left me with deeper insights into the profoundly humanistic and diverse qualities of the neighborhood’s sidewalk life. Serving as the stage for a broad array of different street life, I saw sidewalks host children playing, residents socializing with one another, cops interrogating a man, people sleeping, people using drugs, and people simply going about daily errands. Observations of small, fleeting moments that illustrated both a healthy neighborhood community, like two neighbors running into each other on the street, as well as more damaging conditions, such as the apartment building entrance walled off my drug dealers, deepened my understanding of the complex environment the Tenderloin presents for planners, policymakers, and designers alike.

There were also limitations to my field study methods. Ultimately, public realm observation only allows for the observation of what is visible. Those who do not use the public realm are left out of the scope of the research, and researchers are left to hypothesize about the implications. While Zeisel contends that the absence of certain traces in the built environment is in itself a clue of what is not taking place in a space, ultimately these missing traces require some high-level insights that are not always possible. In the Tenderloin, I limited my study of the neighborhood’s characters to those I observed frequently in the public realm during the day and early evening. This left out people who worked long hours during the day away from the neighborhood and did not return until evening. It also did not capture the types of street activities that take place in the neighborhood late in the evening after businesses and local nonprofit organizations have ended operations. Given that the visibility of street dwelling in the Tenderloin tended to increase as the afternoon turned to evening, it is likely that street dwelling is more prevalent in middle of the night than during the hours I observed the neighborhood. As such a more extensive study of late-night life in the Tenderloin would provide deeper insights into how building programming impacts the neighborhood’s street life, and the extent to which building form determines street dwelling.
Spatial analysis of the Tenderloin’s historic and present-day lot sizes, building typologies, and bordering neighborhood development patterns also provided necessary context for further answering how the neighborhood’s physical forms promote or inhibit change. In building off of my field study observations, counts, and mapping exercises with more technical spatial analysis, I was able to uncover different urban form and social patterns that I would not have necessarily understood had I stopped my analysis at the field study. For example, the design and detailing of many of the Tenderloin’s ground floor buildings reveal little to the passing pedestrian about the uses and users behind its walls. Yet datasets obtained from the City’s open data portal and local planners revealed that many of these ground floor units play pivotal roles in the overall neighborhood character as homeless shelters, schools, workforce training facilities, and SROs. This second layer of data helped me discern patterns of control over the public realm by local nonprofits, government institutions, and private commercial entities, and the nuances of different affordable housing typologies in the neighborhood that physically appear identical but operate quite differently.
Since its inception, the urban planning approaches to the Tenderloin have oscillated between different levels and styles of control and permanence. Certain physical conditions of the neighborhood, such as the streets and block patterns, remain largely unchanged since the neighborhood was first plotted in 1851. By comparison, the social and programmatic uses within these static forms have evolved significantly and at uneven rates. The discrepancies between the static nature of the urban fabric and the more frenetic changes of social uses is in part a reflection of the planning ideals and development pressures that have circulated through the neighborhood and its surrounding context. The eras of change generally fall within four time periods of planning and design themes: the rapid rebuild and rise to prominence of the neighborhood in the decades following the 1906 earthquake and fire; the era of widespread urban renewal efforts between 1950 and 1980; the period of urban renewal backlash by neighborhood conservationists during the 1980s and 1990s; and finally the current period of urban “rebirth” that cities around the country are experiencing as companies and the college-educated, upper-middle class return to urban centers, leading the City to explore both market-driven tax breaks and tactical urbanism for its planning and urban design strategies.
HISTORICAL PLANNING AND URBAN DESIGN POLICY IN THE TENDERLOIN

POST-EARTHQUAKE REBUILD: THE TENDERLOIN’S SECOND CHANCE

On April 18th, 1906, a powerful earthquake struck off the coast of Northern California, sending ripples through San Francisco that would topple buildings and spur over two dozen fires. While the earthquake is oft referred to in more legendary terms, the damage from the resulting fire caused far more damage to the city. Overall, 4-square miles (10% of the City’s total land area) and 28,000 buildings were consumed by the fire. Estimates today attribute 80% of the total damage sustained over the four-day period to the fire directly (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 1972; Siodla, 2015). Like a natural forest fire clearing out more developed trees to make room for necessary new growth, the San Francisco fire offered a similar opportunity for the City in terms of development, and led to a significantly higher density of development in razed areas in comparison to those that were untouched (Siodla, 2015). Within 8 years of the fire, the number of new buildings constructed in the city roughly equaled the number of buildings that the fire had claimed, and the City’s population continued to grow. Following Wheaton’s rule of redevelopment in which redevelopment occurs in areas where the new income received by the redeveloped land exceeds the income from its current use by the cost of redevelopment (Brueckner, 1980; Wheaton, 1982), Siodla contends that the fire offered developers an entirely new economic condition that dramatically accelerated the speed of redevelopment in the city. While redevelopment costs are typically generated by the cost of demolition and passive landowners unwilling to give up the income their property is currently bringing in, neither of these conditions were present in post-Fire San Francisco. Additionally, the fire did little to quell the rapid population growth the city experienced throughout the early part of the 20th Century, and land values had been consistently rising since 1900. With a growing population, rising land values, and a dramatically depleted building stock in need of replenishing, developers faced few hurdles to constructing denser housing types in the razed areas of the City—including the Tenderloin, Mid-Market, Civic Center and SoMa.

The Tenderloin and SoMa were some of the densest neighborhoods in the city, both before and after the earthquake, however they housed starkly different socioeconomic groups. Accounts from the turn of the century indicate that the Tenderloin was regarded not as a slum but rather as a vital theatre and hotel district that provided lodging for the many middle class visitors and workers flocking to the city. In comparison, the truly poor residents of San Francisco lived across Market Street in SoMa, where more meager, low-slung, wood-frame apartment buildings provided a squalid, neglected setting more consistent with New York’s notorious tenement districts than anything exhibited in the Tenderloin. As the city continued to rebuild and the financial sector continued to grow, the key distinction between these two ever-densifying neighborhoods solidified: The Tenderloin was a neighborhood people moved to of their own volition, while
SoMa was a neighborhood made up of people with no other options.

Throughout the 1920s and 30s, the Tenderloin served as a relatively modern kind of neighborhood where young, single professionals lived on their own without supervision for the first time in the City’s history (Sandweiss, 1989). Compared to the rest of the city, the Tenderloin was made up mostly of working people, with higher education levels and jobs that ranged from clerks and salespersons, to attorneys, physicians and civil engineers. Perhaps most notably, it was also a neighborhood with relatively high proportion of women to men residents. On some blocks women outnumbered men almost two to one—a remarkable demographic condition for an urban, pre-War context. Residents lived in a new kind of building, referred to as “second-class” or “family” hotels (Sandweiss, 1989). Tenants would pay for both a single room, usually 8 feet by 10 feet, as well as housekeeping and meals. Bathrooms were typically shared and located on each floor. As a living unit, the family hotel represented a higher standard of living than what was present in the Tenderloin prior to the 1906 rebuild, and offered a new form of independent living for adults who spent most of their day working professional jobs outside the home (Sandweiss, 1989).

In the first two decades of rebuild after the earthquake, the design and programming of this family hotel building typology evolved to create two distinct neighborhood characters across the larger Tenderloin neighborhood. Buildings closer to the more upper-class Nob Hill exhibited a singular residential character—partly in an attempt to soften the cultural stigma of single living and impress a decidedly “domestic” character upon the building. By comparison, the buildings in the southern portion of the Tenderloin (which serves as the definition of the neighborhood for this study) eschewed the domestic in favor of “exotic”. Hotels with names like the Alhambra, the Castle, and the Pharaoh were affixed with playful, larger than life signage that played off of neighborhood bars and clubs. It was from this evocative, wild, non-conventional neighborhood character that the name “Tenderloin” was born (Sandweiss, 1989). By the 1930s, public perception of the Tenderloin began to sour. Despite the fact that the professional, middle-class, population living in the neighborhood had not changed significantly in the last ten years, the neighborhood’s independent streak as a source of housing for single people presented a threatening social condition for many. Sandweiss explains this broader cultural fear of the neighborhood as such:

“If anything, growing public disapproval masked a deeper sense of fear—not the fear of crime or drugs that we now think of in connection with the inner city, but the simple fear of being left alone” (Sandweiss, 1989).

Within this fear of being left alone, was a more targeted fear of the impacts that single, independent women would have on society at a broader level. (Sandweiss, 1989) The irony in this fear of independent living as too socially isolating for women, was that suburban, single-family, detached house neighborhoods was the only promoted alternative. In reality, residential hotels were highly social living environments where adults shared meals and common facilities within their buildings. When compared to the suburban, white-picket fenced, auto-oriented, stay-at-home alternative, the quality and frequency of social interaction found in residential hotels is even more stark.
Advertisements for San Francisco SROs in 1910 (top) and 1939 reveal a high-end, modern set of amenities.
© Mark Ellinger (Up From the Deep, 2014-2015)
Chapter 3

URBAN RENEWAL AND THE SAN FRANCISCO REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

By the 1950s, the Tenderloin’s meteoric rise was beginning to stall, and the narrative of both the residential hotel and the Tenderloin neighborhood had shifted entirely from “independent freedom” to “a place of last resort” for those who were unable to create a nuclear family unit out in the suburbs. These negative perceptions of the Tenderloin and its residential hotel building stock, as well as emerging redevelopment trends in the neighborhoods surrounding the Tenderloin signified the beginning of a 60-year period of disinvestment and disinterest in the future of the neighborhood. New office and tourist hotel high-rise developments in the surrounding Union Square (St. Francis Hotel) and SoMa (Yerba Buena Center) neighborhoods placed more importance on the land itself in the Tenderloin rather than its current use. Residential hotel owners hoping to eventually sell their property to luxury developers for full-scale redevelopment reduced their investments in the physical building and the services it provided to its tenants. Further, the dramatic alteration of the surrounding neighborhoods into high-end tourist-driven commercial centers meant a reduction in the businesses and services that the Tenderloin’s middle-class, single residents had patronized on for years. For hotel owners, the diminishing middle-class neighborhood amenities reduced their ability to command rents that could sustain the costs of the quality services they had been known to provide. From this interconnected web of cause and effect, the remaining residential hotel stock in the neighborhood spiraled downward into a slum-like condition that continued to define it for the next sixty years. Between 1950 and 1960, the Tenderloin population dropped by nearly 10 percent, while city-wide the overall drop in population was closer to six percent. By 1970, the Tenderloin’s population had decreased by another five percent, still outpacing city-wide population decline.

As the City shifted its focused towards capturing more globalized industries and services, San Francisco began its evolution into the “dual city” (Mollenkopf & Castells, 1991) it is today: a central business and tourist/shopping district that catered to an educated, upwardly mobile middle class sitting directly adjacent to a neglected slum teeming with social service institutions. Aiming to beat out other west coast cities in fulfilling the role of “Manhattan-of-the-West”, San Francisco business organizations helped to set the city’s development practices on a blistering pace. The city would eventually add 28 new skyscrapers to its downtown between 1959 and 1974, all within a few blocks of the Tenderloin (Robinson, 1995).

The underlying character of redevelopment in the City was oriented mainly towards attracting a wealthier population of suburban office workers, rather than developing facilities and resources for existing inner-city populations.

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1 Between 1940 and 1950, the Tenderloin population increased by six percent, suggesting that it was still an inner-city neighborhood that could command a certain level of desirability. However, citywide during this same period, the population increased by 18 percent, illustrating the tremendous growth that was happening in outlying parts of the city where lower-density, more suburban lifestyles were on the rise.
Ominously, San Francisco’s City Planning Commission had warned in a 1945 report that “only a relatively small proportion” of foreign born and minority populations would be expected to live in these new modern developments, given their “characteristically low incomes” (Mollenkopf, 1983). The pace and scale at which this redevelopment occurred in the post-War decades was unmatched by any other major American city (Hu, 2013), and like the rapid redevelopment that took place in the city following the 1906 earthquake, the initial spurt was largely led by the private sector, with complicit support by the City government. The result was a powerful and expansive “growth regime” (DeLeon, 1992) that molded Downtown San Francisco into a corporate-driven commercial playground (Robinson, 1995) catering to populations that did not currently live in the inner city at the expense of those that did.

Joining the private sector in overhauling the city’s urban form were two government agencies, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (SFRA) and the San Francisco City Planning Commission (CPC). The SFRA was established in 1948 ahead of the 1949 Housing Act, which would require a local agency to...
implement the new federal urban renewal program. The SFRA was a strikingly powerful and autonomous agency. Its commissioners were appointed by the mayor, but it was relatively free from local control and had direct access to large sums of federal monies. Between 1959 and 1971, the City’s peak period of urban renewal operations, the SFRA had access to $128 million in federal funds, and was able to issue its own bonds for additional capital. In short, it was a powerful organization that used its wealth and threats of eminent domain to generate “willing” sellers when necessary for achieving its redevelopment goals (Hartman, Carnochan, & Hartman, 2002).

These dates also align with the reign of the SFRA’s most notable leader, Justin Herman. A verified ‘Robert Moses of the West’, Herman was given free-reign by then Mayor George Christopher and involved himself directly in eight large-scale, multi-system renewal projects. He instilled an aggressive, scorched earth mentality within the Agency that swiftly transformed the physical and social landscape of the city (DeLeon, 1992) through a combination of eminent domain and condemnation to clear 1,302 acres of “blighted” land in the name of urban renewal—much of it within the central portions of the city. After clearing the existing, low-income populations from a neighborhood (almost 40,000 in total), Herman advocated for the “protection of the core”, meaning the overt separation of the original occupants of a neighborhood from the higher-income residents of the new development. The term came to be used as a code within the SFRA and City Hall for designing developments that used a ring of new imposing office buildings as an impenetrable fortress around the high-end residential and commercial core. Its insidious origins can be traced back to studies from the 1960s indicating that displaced persons were likely to relocate as close as possible to the site of their original home (Hartman et al., 2002).

For the most part, the SFRA positioned its spotlight on areas just beyond the Tenderloin’s borders, allowing the neighborhood to avoid government intervention during the City’s urban renewal heyday. Whether this situation resulted in a better or worse set of outcomes for the neighborhood is not fully clear. Despite SFRA’s lack of interest in the neighborhood, high-end development along its borders with Union Square and Nob Hill attracted private developers looking to invest in vacant land or downtrodden buildings that could be converted into high-end residential properties. The residential hotels of the neighborhood—long since fallen from the public’s graces as an idealized living unit—became a frequent target for developers who sought to either demolish them completely or convert them into hotels for tourists. Between 1977 and 1986, average rents in the Tenderloin rose 337%, while rents in residential hotels or SROs in particular rose 385% (Robinson, 1995). In 1981 alone, 18 different redevelopment projects, most of which were hotels or office towers, were proposed or approved in the Tenderloin.

While the intended benefactors of the SFRA’s redevelopment projects lived outside the city center, those who lived in neighborhoods like the Tenderloin experienced intense environmental, social, and infrastructural degradation. The rampant pace of office and hotel development in Downtown San Francisco brought in an estimated 500% increase in taxes, yet at the loss of untold social and historic architectural capital (Robinson, 1995).
A 1950s shuttle station in the Tenderloin for transporting between Union Square and the airport contrasts with the original urban form character.
© Mark Ellinger (Up From the Deep, 2014-2015)

View of Yerba Buena Center in the late 1990s illustrates the disruption in the urban fabric created by the project.
© Chris Carlsson (FoundSF, 1998)
BACKLASH TO URBAN RENEWAL: GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM AND COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING IN THE TENDERLOIN

As the effects of the SFRA’s most impactful projects materialized, public opinion of the agency and its “growth at all costs” mentality started to divide into two groups. A strong pro-growth contingent led by the business community still had major support from City Hall, but their dominance was threatened by a new movement of “growth control” advocates who were tired of the unchecked power that redevelopment had wielded in the city for decades. They advocated for a city with human-scaled neighborhood character that the functionalist and sterile “international style” favored by developers and planners of the urban renewal era had shunned, and they organized resistance from the low-income communities who had borne the brunt of the SFRA project impacts.

Starting in 1971, the anti-growth movement sought to reign in the SFRA and private-interest office development through the use of ballot measures. Measure T, which proposed an improbable 6-story height limit for all new development in the City, was overwhelmingly rejected by voters, however it planted the seed for an anti-growth activism movement that would continue on into the 1980s. The following year, a more watered down version of Measure T was presented to voters. The measure again failed to pass, but this time the margin had shrunk by 10 points. These consecutive ballot measures from the anti-growth contingent sent a strong message to City Hall and pro-growth power regime that there was a growing minority discontent with their actions, and that ballot measures had the potential for altering the physical environment too (DeLeon, 1992).

At the same time of the anti-growth’s rise, market forces were also beginning to loosen the pro-growth regime’s grip on the city. DeLeon contends that its gradual loss of power was in part its own doing after decades of overbuilding office space, displacing the poor, and building high-end services for the rich and suburban commuters. The regime’s original stated goal to bring opportunities to the workers of San Francisco was no longer reflected in the developments it produced (DeLeon, 1992), making it increasingly difficult to garner local support for its projects.

Unlike the Western Addition and SoMa communities who were systematically uprooted before they could build up a resistance to urban renewal, the City’s hands-off approach to the Tenderloin meant that the community had time to develop a more sophisticated and grassroots anti-growth operation. In 1979, the first neighborhood-wide political advocacy group for the Tenderloin started operations, calling itself the North of Market Planning Coalition (NOMPC) (Robinson, 1995). It set up an office, hired a small staff, and began offering as many as 1,000 residents different outlets for channeling their political interests and concerns.

An NOMPC began to develop a unified political voice for thousands of Tenderloin residents, other political- and social-advocacy groups descended upon the neighborhood as well. These included nonprofit housing advocates and developers like the Tenderloin Housing
Clinic, as well as homeless shelters and local business associations (Robinson, 1995). The variation in these local interest groups offers helpful insights into the truly complex web of poverty, drug abuse, immigration, and homelessness that had enveloped the neighborhood since the 1950s, and also helps to answer why the Tenderloin continues to ward off redevelopment attempts in 2017. Powerful urban restructuring forces will always face resistance from “neighborhoods that do not want to disappear, regional cultures that want to cluster together, and by people, who previously uprooted, want to create new roots” (Castells, 1983). The extent to which NOMPC was able to successfully leverage these factors and channel them against development attempts is best illustrated with the following campaigns.
The SRO Conversion Ordinance

Once known as “family hotels” that offered an affordable independent lifestyle for single middle-class workers, suburbanization of both residents and jobs between the 1960s and 1980s diminished the importance of the SRO hotel for the middle class, along with its relative value. Throughout decades of urban renewal that decimated services and public infrastructure within inner cities across the country, these dense, “cheap by design” housing units catered to the poorest of poor who simply could not afford to relocate. These older and neglected structures became known for housing similarly defined populations that had been left behind as the focus of city planners moved to workers who commuted from the suburbs.

As the populations they housed became more vulnerable, and the cost of providing quality services for relatively low rent proved more challenging, the temptation for hotel owners to sell their property for redevelopment efforts between the 1960s and 1980s became acute. The loss of private, lower-rent housing that could house both long-time residents and more transient populations had immediate and long-term effects on the character and quality of neighborhoods. Tony Robinson’s 1995 study of redevelopment resistance in the Tenderloin describes the changes in the SRO landscape at length, and is summarized as follows:

Nationally, major cities in the United States saw tremendous SRO building stock decline as federal urban renewal efforts ramped up. Over a 20-year period, Chicago lost 80% of its units, while in New York City 61% of its SRO stock was lost in just eight years. Denver, saw over 60% of its stock decimated as well in an astonishing five-year period. In San Francisco, SROs were largely confined to three neighborhoods: Chinatown, SoMa (particularly the 6th Street Corridor), and the Tenderloin—which on its own contained 40% of the city’s entire SRO stock. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Tenderloin lost 3,000 units out of total 8,000 units lost throughout the entire city. Its proximity to tourism sites like Union Square offered developers multiple options for derelict SRO buildings: they could either scrap them entirely and rebuild, a potentially time intensive operation, or they could evict their current tenants and refurbish the buildings as “tourist” hotels without making dramatic changes to the structure. The tourist hotel conversion route proved to be popular in the Tenderloin. Between 1975 and 1985, 45 SRO buildings were removed from the market, of which 62% were refurbished specifically as tourist hotels.

In 1980, through coordinated and researched-backed organizing efforts by NOMPC, the Board of Supervisors approved a moratorium on SRO conversions, and called for further study by the Department of City Planning. Planning would eventually conclude its findings later that year, agreeing with much of what the NOMPC had asserted in its own studies: that the units played a vital role in housing impoverished and elderly communities. It would also recommend that the City preserve and even enlarge its SRO housing stock by implementing a ban on all SRO conversions.

In a stunning departure from its historic treatment of low-income and blighted neighborhoods, the Board of Supervisors permanently banned the conversion of SRO units to tourist units—the first of its kind in the United States. Conversions could still occur legally, but doing so would compel the building owner to contribute $500,000 to the city’s affordable housing fund. Its impact
Total SRO Units Per Building By Neighborhood
on conversions in the neighborhood was significant. In the five years leading up to the ordinance, nearly 5,000 units were converted city-wide. In the 8 years following the ordinance, only 109 units were legally converted.

Today, the SRO conversion ordinance protects approximately 21,363 SRO units, across 500 different buildings within the city. The Tenderloin in particular has approximately 5,439 protected SRO units (San Francisco Department of City Planning, 2016). It is likely that without the conversion ordinance many of the Tenderloin’s SROs would cease to exist. Particularly given the extents of the Bay Area’s current affordable housing crisis, the demand for urban housing units, no matter the size or location, would likely prove too great for SRO building owners to resist upscale conversion.

By all intents and purposes therefore, the ordinance is an act of historic programmatic preservation, despite the fact that the population that SROs were designed for (working-class, single adults, who could largely tend to their own daily needs without government or institutional assistance) no longer make up the majority of tenants. Today, many SROs (particularly those operated by nonprofits) serve as rehabilitation centers where people experiencing physical and mental health conditions on a wide spectrum can live cheaply and in proximity of the services and uses they require. Most SRO buildings are owned and operated by private landlords, but about 20% of the total stock are either owned or master-leased by nonprofit service organizations, many of whom are highly involved in the daily lives of their tenants. They provide counseling, on-site social workers, legal services, and general property management. In some cases, the on-site services go beyond the basics, such as the Ellis Street Apartments where Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation houses twenty-four formerly homeless teens and young adults and offers medical care (including HIV/AIDS services) and employment counseling [TNDC, 2016].

These nonprofit SRO operators are able to provide shelter to their tenants in a centrally located, transit-accessible location because the ordinance has eliminated the property owner’s incentive to redevelop for higher-income users, and thus many occupy old, dilapidated housing buildings in which property owners have no financial incentive to invest. The ordinance did not include provisions for how these units would be maintained over time, and how the financial loss that property owners took by losing the right to convert their buildings and command higher rents could be mitigated. While the ordinance preserved units, it also ensured a cycle of neglect that disinfected property owners to invest in services and upkeep, which in turn kept the rents low and attracted increasingly lower-income tenants—many with serious physical and mental health conditions. Monthly rents for a privately-operated SRO in 2015 ranged from $650 to $700, compared to the then

2 The variation in these numbers is due to the lack of precise metrics for defining and counting the units from year to year. The Department of Building Inspection keeps a master list of units and is tasked with reporting back to the Board of Supervisors on the status of the units city-wide, but there are inconsistencies between this list, the Mayor’s Affordable Housing Inventory list, the self-reported number of units per building listed on various nonprofit organizations’ websites, and property data from the San Francisco Assessor.
Parcel Locations of SROs Operated by Nonprofits
average for a market-rate studio Downtown at $2,200 per month. Perhaps in terms of dollars per month, the rents of Tenderloin SROs are on the cheaper side, but when factoring in the reported physical and emotional health hazards many of these SROs present, the total cost of living in an SRO becomes less clear-cut.

While SROs are clearly not a one-size-fits-all solution for low-income housing in San Francisco, they currently serve as the largest supplier of low-cost housing in the city. City agencies like the Department of Public Health and nonprofit organizations like the Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation have investigated the conditions of these units in detail and advocated for reforms, but significant roadblocks—including building age, high operations and maintenance costs, low general reserves, master lease agreements, and tenant (and visitor) behaviors—prevent building owners and operators from widely implementing substantial changes. Of the many deleterious conditions these buildings and units present, the following are some of the most acute:

- On average, SRO buildings are some of the oldest in San Francisco. While the city’s median age of housing stock is 1927, 47 percent of SROs were constructed within five years of the 1906 earthquake, and 61 percent within seven years.
- Residents of SROs and the neighborhoods they occupy exhibit proportionally high vulnerability factors including being lower
income, a person of color, a senior, and overall high levels of exposure to more concentrated environmental risk factors.

SROs in the Tenderloin neighborhood had particularly high proportions of Department of Health violations, with the most common violation types related to animals/pests, mold, refuse, sanitation, and structural conditions of the building or unit.

In conversations with Tenderloin residents and employees of local nonprofit affordable housing providers, the idea of the SRO as a figurative “warehouse” for storing the poorest people in the city emerges. Consolidated together away from the easy public view, the sheer density of Tenderloin SRO units is remarkable—453 protected SRO units alone are located within a six-block area (Murphy, 2009). This high concentration of people in extreme poverty with limited networks (i.e. the recently homeless and incarcerated), place in their SRO units by the City through various rehabilitation programs, has perpetuated the co-location of government and nonprofit services in the neighborhood, as well as the continued purchasing and master-leasing of SRO buildings by nonprofit housing development corporations (in 2015, 57% of all neighborhood SROs were operated by nonprofits). The result is a neighborhood that is given no choice but to bear the brunt of San Francisco’s housing and homelessness crises, in no small part due to the prevalence of SRO units that exist because of the 1980 ordinance.
Development Agreements

In 1979, “conventionteering” was a rapidly growing industry in cities across the country—except in San Francisco where it fell by 8.8%. The lack of large, high-end hotels and convention centers in the city was seen as the leading culprit for this embarrassment, and in the spring of 1980 Hilton Hotel, Ramada, and the Holiday Inn corporations all announced plans for luxury developments along the Tenderloin’s eastern border. Together, the projects would increase San Francisco’s hotel stock by 12%, demolishing existing neighborhood retail, bars, and services in the process. The mere mention of the proposed hotel developments sent property values in the area skyrocketing, and in the months prior to the SRO Conversion Ordinance adoption, many SRO owners converted their buildings into tourist hotels to help offset their increased property taxes (Robinson, 1995).

In the Tenderloin, NOMPC again rallied residents, local faith leaders, and advocates to form the Luxury Hotel Task Force and challenge the City leaders to defend the displacement of poor residents to transform the neighborhood into a tourist-based economy. Task force members waged a highly public battle, from protests at the steps of the existing Hilton Hotel to interviews with the local press. The hotels were described by residents as “monsters”, “neighborhood destroyers”, and “oppressive feudal castles” in a San Francisco Examiner story from the summer of 1980, and legendary public-interest attorney Sue Hestor summed up the appearances of the proposed hotels as, “these monolithic, not particularly attractive buildings have facades that tell you to keep out unless you’re part of their clientele.”

Despite their passionate resistance against the hotels, the activists were also pragmatic. It was clear that the tourism-industry-obsessed City would be incapable of preventing such lucrative hotel deals from moving forward, so the task force focused instead on leveraging the maximum possible value from these corporations for the Tenderloin neighborhood itself. In all of their activist efforts, NOMPC following a simple, core philosophy—that those who profit from high-end development must be the ones to pay for mitigating the resulting harm the development would inflict on the local residents. Again relying on their members’ keen legal knowledge and research abilities, NOMPC provided reports to the City Planning Commission detailing how the new hotels would hurt existing neighborhood housing stock as well as the City’s overall ability to provide low-income housing for its residents. Their goal was to use the Environmental Impact Review, a State-mandated process under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), to mitigate negative socioeconomic impacts caused by private development. CEQA requires an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) of any project or plan that causes “any substantial adverse effects on human beings, either direct or indirect” (State of California, 1970), the intent being to ensure that any project or planning activities would not have adverse physical impacts on the environment. The idea of mitigating socioeconomic impacts was a novel concept that had never been proposed before.

In the ensuing EIR hearings for the hotel projects, the City Planning Commission
advised for the City to adopt the EIR with the following mitigation measures, to be paid for by the hotel developers:

- Fund community activities such as a childcare center, senior center, neighborhood park, and a neighborhood rezoning study
- Encourage preferential hiring of Tenderloin residents at the hotels
- Donate over one-half million dollars to a Tenderloin Community Fund
- Create a housing subsidy fund through a hotel occupancy rate tax

In 1981, these mitigations were extensive and the first of their kind to ever been exacted from hotel developers in the United States. They laid the groundwork for a new era of public-private partnership in urban centers, which would become a larger state-wide movement with the arrival of Proposition 13 (Fulton, 1984). With a reduced source of revenue from property taxes as a result of Proposition 13, cities realized that development agreements were an essential means for obtaining the necessary financing to build new projects in a way that redistributed benefits more equitably for all residents.

In 2017, Tenderloin nonprofits continue to leverage benefits for the neighborhood through development agreements on a project by project basis. Looking to avoid long, drawn out legal battles, several recently proposed market-rate mixed-use housing and commercial developments in and around the Tenderloin have sought to appease neighborhood activists as swiftly as possible. Working directly with nonprofit affordable housing developers like the Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation and the Tenderloin Housing Clinic, one particular deal with the market-rate developer of a project at 950 Market Street resulted in an agreement with the City to both purchase land in the Tenderloin for off-site affordable housing development and provide an additional $14.8 million in fees that will help to build the resulting 68-unit affordable studio project.

That these development agreements are being forged between developers and nonprofit organizations today, as opposed to community groups like NOMPC from the 1980s, demonstrates the powerful role that nonprofits have forged for themselves within the Tenderloin, and the extent to which the City looks to them to serve as the voice of the community in brokering beneficial deals. Still keenly aware of the inevitable threat that gentrification places on the Tenderloin, the Executive Director of the Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation, Don Falk, describes the nonprofit’s strategy as “not to stop projects, but to try and get community benefits to help mitigate their impact... That has been the Tenderloin strategy for 30 years—it’s a long-term view (J. K. Dineen, 2016)”.

Planning and Urban Design Policies in the Tenderloin
Neighborhood Downzoning

While the Tenderloin community largely viewed the socioeconomic mitigations from the hotel companies to be a successful result from NOMPC’s aggressive activism, the long-term sustainability of a project-by-project approach for fighting gentrification and displacement immediately proved futile. In 1982, two additional luxury hotel proposals for the Tenderloin emerged, along with plans for a massive office/retail/hotel project called Union Square West. A community group like NOMPC, drawing most of its strength from volunteers, did not have the bandwidth to take on the daunting task of fighting new projects, year after year, to win more development mitigations. They needed a tactic that was less reactive and could instead begin to address the root of the issue with gentrification in the Tenderloin: a density of blocks that were filled with small, blighted buildings that sat on parcels zoned for much more intensive uses.

In 1981, NOMPC took on its biggest project yet in drafting a proposed neighborhood downzoning that would bring the allowed building height down from 320 to 80 feet, and a special use overlay district that would prohibit commercial uses beyond the first two floors of a building. NOMPC made a compelling case that the zoning allowed for the neighborhood by-right was grossly out of scale. Although low-rise residential uses made up 80% of the neighborhood, zoning for most parcels encouraged high-rise commercial uses. Even more striking was the allowed height limit of 320 feet, despite the fact that only 5% of the neighborhood’s buildings were taller than 70 feet.

San Francisco Department of City Planning Director at the time, Dean Macris, sided with NOMPC’s zoning study and helped to ensure the zoning legislation passed the Board of Supervisors. Macris’ inclination towards the height restriction for the neighborhood was in part due to a recent trip to Paris where he saw first-hand how entire districts with five-story height limits had resulted in well-kept, high-value properties (Robinson, 1995). When the option of demolishing a smaller building to replace it with a much larger one is one longer available, property owners are forced to invest in the buildings that they have.

Out of this zoning legislation, no building could exceed 80 feet (without substantial mitigation), commercial uses were restricted to the first and second floors, and tourist-serving proposals were prohibited. In 2017, many impacts of the downzoning are plainly visible—the neighborhood continues to be free of luxury hotels, retail centers, and office towers, and there is relatively little building stock in the core of the neighborhood constructed in the 1980s and 1990s. However, the crux of former Planning Director Macris’ last minute inclination towards the height restriction—that downzoning forces property owners to invest in what they have rather than hold out for something bigger—has not proven true in the Tenderloin. While there are some shining examples of restored and well-maintained buildings, including the recently opened Tenderloin Museum and its adjoining, Cadillac Hotel, the neighborhood’s most prominent real estate holdings today are contemporary structures built within the last 30 years by nonprofit housing developers. That the majority of redevelopment taking place in the Tenderloin is by and for the nonprofit sector highlights the impact that this zoning change has had on the power structure of the neighborhood, and the extent to which it has perpetuated residents’ dependence on local nonprofit organizations to uphold the quality of the physical environment.
Urban Design Plan 1972 and Downtown Plan 1985

The Urban Design Plan 1972 signaled the start of a new post-urban-renewal era for the city government, where holistic, neighborhood-oriented, context-driven planning ideals started to displace the modernist ideals touted by Justin Herman and the SFRA. San Francisco’s city-wide urban design plan was the first of its kind amongst American cities, and it quickly became celebrated as a precedent for systematizing the role of design in complex, political contexts. The Plan also heralded a departure from the modernist, urban renewal approach to city design where entire blocks were razed so that new, distinct forms could be inserted and observed in their entirety. Developments like the Yerba Buena Center were intended to replace the chaotic, frenzied patterns of SoMa’s tenements, with clean, broad strokes that would restore order to the City. Under modernism, context was the enemy, and design was the weapon for annihilating it. With San Francisco’s Urban Design Plan, planners attempted a new tack and instead looked to policy, comprehensive plans, programs, and guidelines as tools for shaping the built environment (Hu, 2013). Through this plan, and its successor the Downtown Plan, the City sought to regulate post-war development for the first time in a way that could respond to the popular sentiments of the growth control movement (Hu, 2013).

The Urban Design Plan was structured around four key sections: City Pattern, Conservation, Major New Development and Neighborhood Environment. Each section is further broken down into overall objective, fundamental principles, and implementation policies—a fairly standard structure by today’s standards. What was unique about the Urban Design Plan’s structure in 1971, however, was its fourth subsection, titled “human needs”. This new emphasis on the social power of urban design, and the role it played in addressing the physical and emotional qualities of cities (Hu, 2013) was a remarkable departure from Justin Herman’s SFRA merciless approach to development throughout the 1960s. Perhaps weary from a long period of antagonism, the Urban Design Plan served as an olive branch from the Department of City Planning to the public by promoting the ideal that urban design should be more than simply the act of creating something new and beautiful, but rather an essential, everyday condition that made people’s lives better.

This pragmatic approach to design, and the assumption that good city design required some level of standardization, was not without critique. The complex web of technical design review mandated by the plan was difficult to navigate for both planners and developers alike (Plunter, 1999); and some argued that the Plan had an inverse effect on city-wide urban design by impacting the city’s form more with the types of development it prevented, rather than those it promoted. Regardless, the tone set by the Urban Design Plan, and the subsequent Downtown Plan in 1985, signaled the arrival of a new Lynchian sensibility for the City’s planners who sought to understand how people use and perceive a city (Hu, 2013). Lynch referred to this concept as the ‘imageability’ of a city, and this, along with other concepts from his 1960 work, Image of the City, would feed directly into the City’s approach for developing design guidelines and standards protecting the urban scale and character of the city.
CONTEMPORARY PLANNING AND URBAN DESIGN STRATEGIES

This cultural shift in the City’s perception of the role that public sector planning and urban design should take in shaping the urban form is illustrated by two contemporary ideologies—both of which build off of the historical efforts described previously. The first, “tactical urbanism” is a grassroots-inspired design construct that today is orchestrated and implemented mainly by the Department of City Planning, while the second, the “tax break” and its accompanying programs is a more neo-liberal approach spearheaded by the Mayor’s Office of Economic and Workforce Development and the City’s Board of Supervisors. Together, the implementation of these two different intervention ideologies offer perspective into the current role of planning and planners in complex urban contexts like those exhibited by the Tenderloin.

TAX BREAKS AND OTHER INCENTIVES FOR INNOVATION AGGLOMERATION

Overview of the “Twitter Tax Break”

In 2011, Mid-Market was in a particularly dire state. Despite indications that the city’s commercial development and real estate industry was back on track after the previous years of recession, costs per square foot in the Mid-Market area for retail and office spaces remained below 30 and 40 percent of surrounding areas, respectively, and vacancy rates were also disproportionately high. Meanwhile, in January of that same year Edwin M. Lee assumed the role of interim Mayor, stepping in to finish out the final year of Gavin Newsom’s term, who had moved on to serve as the State’s Attorney General. Lee inherited a city that was desperate to find its economic footing and was staring at an unemployment rate that hovered above 9% (San Francisco Center for Economic Development, 2010). The City was simultaneously in the process of losing one of its brightest business success stories in recent years, Twitter—and its several hundred employees—to a cheaper and more business-friendly city to the south (Lang, 2015). Although the number of smaller technology start-ups in the city had skyrocketed since the recession, larger more mature start-ups like Twitter were coming face to face with a municipal tax structure that disincentivized fast-growth, high-salaried companies on track for an Initial Public Offering (IPO). Threatening to leave its San Francisco location to avoid a substantial tax increase, the Mayor’s Office of Economic and Workforce Development worked quickly to broker a deal that would entice Twitter to stay in San Francisco while also providing the Mayor with a legacy project that could bolster his public image. As an interim Mayor who had not been elected by the people on any particular policy platform, and was replacing one of the most popular mayors in San Francisco history, Lee was in need of a “quick win” that would help define his short time in office.3

The Mayor sought to take a business-friendly approach, and targeted an outdated tax code regulation that had discouraged small but

3 As a condition of his election by the Board of Supervisors, Lee promised to not seek the office in the open election later that fall, yet would eventually break that promise eight months later (Cote, 2011).
rapidly growing start-ups from staying in San Francisco. Prior to the Tax Break, businesses in San Francisco with over $250,000 in payroll expenses were taxed 1.5% on payroll expenses within the city. Through the Tax Break, a participating business who located within one of the parcels defined in the Tax Break Area could avoid paying taxes on all additional payroll it had accrued beyond the payroll of its “base year” (either 2011 or the first year it located in the Tax Break Area). Companies could participate in the Tax Break for up to six consecutive years, after which their payroll taxes would return to a normal city-wide rate and their CBA commitments would disappear.

Twitter agreed to the terms and on April 19, 2011, the Board of Supervisors passed the Tax Break, officially known as the Central Market Tenderloin Payroll Tax Exclusion Ordinance. Within three days, Twitter publicly announced its move to its 1355 Market Street headquarters, where it would serve as the anchor of a new tech district (J. K. Dineen, 2012).

Perhaps a broader indication of the tech industry’s innate desire to “fix” any problem it encounters, Twitter co-founder Evan Williams attributed the company’s decision to locate in the Tax Break Area partly to the dilapidated condition of the neighborhood he encountered in 2011.

"[The office building] was in this run-down mid-Market area, and I thought if we brought thousands of employees there every day, we could have a revitalizing force" (Williams, 2015).

This narrative, of “tech” as a potential savior for the neighborhood based purely on its ability to bring a new density of wealth and resources to a neighborhood rife with poverty-induced conditions is maintained by City officials as well, including Mayor Lee, who attributed new job creation and affordable housing production through the city in 2015 to the Tax Break and the economic development it has spurred in Mid-Market (Lang, 2015). What remains unclear from the Mayor’s statement, is a deeper explanation of how job creation for tech employees equates to improvements for existing Tenderloin residents, and how economic development spurred by the Tax Break impacts those who fall outside of the tech industry’s purview.

Given the short time since its implementation, the extent of the Tax Break’s economic impact on the Tenderloin are not yet fully understood. Between 2011 and 2013, 15 different businesses participated in the Tax Break, resulting in a combined $4.2 million dollars of savings for the companies, while during the same period the Tax Break Area generated $7.1 million more in payroll tax than it would have if businesses in the Area had continued to grow at the same rate as the rest of the city (Office of the Controller & Office of Economic Analysis, 2014). While critics of the Tax Break labeled it a “handout to wealthy techies” that “panders to multibillion-dollar companies at the expense of small businesses and residents”, estimates from the City’s Office of Economic Analysis indicate that the City may have lost out on $34 to $56 million in taxes from Twitter alone over the years following its 2013 IPO.

However, proponents of the Tax Break—
particularly Mayor Lee point to the physical improvements along Market Street such as the refurbished tech offices and new higher-end restaurants and services. Lee and others point out that had Twitter left the city, none of these new amenities would exist and any money the City currently yields from the Tax Break companies would have been forfeited entirely.

“This transformation — which benefits all residents of the Central Market and Tenderloin neighborhoods and our entire city — simply would not have occurred without the Central Market/Tenderloin Payroll Tax Exclusion” (Mayor Edwin M. Lee, 2015).

In its 2014 summary report of the Tax Break’s impacts to-date, the City acknowledges the lack of certitude one can attribute to a tax break’s impacts given that the scenario comparison of “tax break” vs. “no tax break” is purely hypothetical. In reality, it is unknowable whether the companies that took advantage of the Tax Break and moved to the Mid-Market Area would have moved away from San Francisco had it not been for the Tax Break. If the Tax Break prevented their otherwise certain relocation to another city, then it is a wild success that brought new revenue to the City that would otherwise have gone to other cities. On the other hand, if the Tax Break was simply a tool for incentivizing San Francisco companies to relocate to another part of the city, the report concluded that the portion of the payroll tax lost to the exclusion would have an overall negative net fiscal impact for the City [Office of the Controller & Office of Economic Analysis, 2014].

Regardless of its yet to be determined overall economic impacts on the city, the process by which the Tax Break was both introduced, and implemented, demonstrates a sharp contrast to how NOMPC, the City, and the luxury hotel corporations engaged in the 1980s. While NOMPC pressured the City to extract community benefits from the hotel companies through mitigation measures tied to legally binding EIRs, the Tax Break required relatively soft concessions of the companies. Any company could receive a payroll tax break for nothing in exchange, so long as it occupied office space in one of the designated Tax Break Area parcels and agreed to participate in the City’s First Source Hiring Program—a relatively low bar. Only companies with an annual payroll above $1 million were required to pay an additional concession to the community in the form of a Community Benefit Agreement (CBA).

From the inception of the ordinance, the CBAs were envisioned to serve as a symbolic offering of goodwill to a neighborhood that had spent decades fighting luxury hotels and office developments at its border while receiving none of the economic development these uses purported to offer. The limited language describing them in the ordinance lacked any sort of legal fortitude, and offered no specific values or measurements by which the quality of a company’s proposed agreement could be assessed. The extent of the description in the ordinance offers the weak guidance that, CBAs “may” include any form of commitments to engage in community activities within either
Central Market Street or the Tenderloin Area, as well as participation in any workforce development opportunities.

The ordinance called for a Citizen’s Advisory Committee (CAC) to serve as the initial gatekeeper for approval of each participating company’s CBA. The CAC would include representatives of different Tenderloin stakeholder groups, including neighborhood residents and experts on various Tenderloin-relevant topics including workforce and job creation, affordable housing, anti-displacement, local businesses in the area, and homelessness. As an advisory committee to the Board of Supervisors, the CAC was tasked with reviewing all CBAs and offering suggestions to the companies, but ultimately the extent of their power was a symbolic vote on whether or not to recommend approval of a CBA by the Board of Supervisors. Beyond their relatively dispensable voting responsibilities, the CAC also had limited standards by which to judge or compare the quality of a CBA. As crafted in the ordinance, the CBA and CAC were hollow attempts at leveraging value from the private sector for the Tenderloin, and had it not been for one particularly motivated company, both would have likely been treated as a such from the start.

**Corporations as Community Builders?**

In 2011, Zendesk was a small, but growing start-up software company located in South Park, the ‘Rodeo Drive’ of the San Francisco tech scene. In need of a larger office space that was more transit accessible, and also affordable, the company set its eyes on a recently renovated but low-rent unit at 989 Market Street within the Mid-Market corridor. For the price, the office space seemed like a steal. Despite the notorious crime and homelessness conditions the area was known for, the company weighed its options and decided to go ahead with the move. Although the tax savings were not what drew the company to the neighborhood initially, Zendesk quickly connected with the CBA component of the Tax Break, and used the requirement for community service in the neighborhood to strengthen its own corporate identity as a socially conscious company.

As the only company participating in the first year of the Tax Break, and the only company that had a full-time staff member dedicated to working on its CBA from the start, Zendesk developed a level of trust with the CAC that later Tax Break companies were never able to match. It worked closely with the CAC and other neighborhood groups, asking questions and seeking input to ensure that its CBA addressed the issues that mattered most; and it opened the doors of its office up for community meetings and events. Many employees became passionate volunteers, arriving to work early so that they could spend more time out of the office serving free lunches at Glide or handing out socks at St. Boniface. Some Zendesk employees would later join the boards of local nonprofits, suggesting that this sense of corporate responsibility held by the company had actually helped spur more personal senses of responsibility amongst their employees as well. The CAC appreciated Zendesk’s earnest desire to be a helpful neighbor in the Tenderloin, and its willingness to think bigger about its role in equity and poverty issues affecting the city. When Twitter, One King’s Lane, Yammer, Zoosk, and Spotify joined the Tax Break, the CBA drafted by
Zendesk became their template. Ultimately, it would be Zendesk’s enthusiasm for corporate social responsibility and fostering relationships within the Tenderloin that would become the measure for success that the ordinance had failed to articulate.

Companies that joined the Tax Break later lacked Zendesk’s sophistication and commitment to social equity. In using the Zendesk CBA as a template for their own, most of the companies made changes that would reduce their overall level of commitment to the neighborhood, and inserted vaguely worded goals and commitments that would be difficult to verify completion of. In one of the more egregious examples, Zoosk, illustrated a basic misunderstanding of the term “local business” when in a 2013 progress report the company stated that it had completed one of its CBA goals by encouraging employees to support such “local” businesses as Wells Fargo, Chase Bank, Bank of America, “Apple Store”, and “Union Square” (presumably the shopping district made up almost entirely of chain retail stores).

Beyond the gaffes and lack of focus exhibited by many of the companies’ CBAs since 2012, the CBAs raise other questions about what the long-term role of any company can and should be in a neighborhood with deeply rooted, systemic poverty—and what role City government should play in curating a mixed-income space that works for everyone. The structure promoted by the CBAs resulted in lists developed by each company of proposed actions to be completed over the course of a year. The results from the companies were typically short-term, instantly quantified actions like total logged volunteer hours and material donations. By comparison to the benefits obtained through NOMPC’s EIR mitigations, the CBAs did not typically result in a physical, longer-lasting, urban design changes within the neighborhood that could live on beyond the lifespan of any one company— or a tax break. Nor did they introduce longer term workforce development strategies that could give Tenderloin residents more tools for breaking the cycle of poverty and joining the tech economy in a more meaningful capacity. The resulting CBA actions are better described as ‘social impact triage’, in which companies exerted the bulk of their philanthropic efforts on helping people meet their most basic needs, such as food and clothing.

Local neighborhood entrepreneur Del Seymour once sold crack on the streets of the Tenderloin, but today he is a busy entrepreneur running Tenderloin Walking Tours and Tenderloin Tech Lab, two organizations that receive substantial donations from the Mid-Market tech companies. Seymour also sits on the board of the Gubbio Project, a Catholic homeless services organization, and is a visible presence in the neighborhood with his ever-present fedora. While he has found ways to profit off the arrival of the tech companies by leading tours for their employees, he recognizes the limited benefit that cash and volunteer hours from these companies bring to a neighborhood that is battling problems beyond just homelessness:

“What we’d really like to see is these companies hiring people into their tech cathedrals” (Seymour, 2015).
In a neighborhood with systemic, multigenerational poverty, small cash infusions and free socks from tech companies are nice, but decent-paying jobs—and the education and training they require—are what will actually help people escape the cycle of poverty.

As Market Street’s seemingly overnight transformation into an opulent boulevard of “tech cathedrals” was touted as the textbook case for successful skid row revitalization, Tenderloin residents and activists pointed to the lack of substantive changes to most of the economic, social, and physical crises that had gripped the neighborhood for decades. Despite the Tenderloin neighborhood being included in the Tax Break Area, the difference in trajectories of the Tenderloin and Mid-Market corridor over the last six years is vast, and continuing to grow.

Estimates of participating company savings for 2015, the latest year to be released from the City Tax Assessor indicate that tech companies saved a collective $33.7 million over the Tax Break’s six-year existence (Lang, 2015), while the total amount of money they have returned to the neighborhood through donations and services is closer to $8 million. The gap in these figures begs the question: did the City miss a crucial opportunity with the Tax Break to paint a bolder, more visionary picture of what a truly mixed-income neighborhood could look like? Could a more concerted effort by planners and designers have improved the disparity that is evidenced today?

While Zendesk has spent 6 years forging relationships with community groups and collaborating on homelessness and poverty initiatives, the company’s long-term role in the neighborhood is unknown. Unlike the built environment, companies change quickly, as do their values. In 2017, Zendesk has reached the end of its Tax Break eligibility and ultimately is “off the hook” for further neighborhood concessions. Presently, it sees volunteerism and social responsibility as an important marketing tool in attracting the brightest and best in young talent, and plans to continue its hands-on philanthropy efforts in the neighborhood. However, the extent to which the Tenderloin can count on these offerings from either Zendesk, or the other companies as they exit the Tax Break too, is murky at best.

**Impacts of the Tax Break To-Date**

In its six-year existence, the Twitter Tax Break has left a trail of controversy in its wake, with advocates on both sides of the gentrification and economic revitalization debate offering a litany of indicators proving their side. More neutral sources contend that the full weight of the tax break’s impact on the Tenderloin and Mid-Market are still largely unknown (Hardy, 2015). Today, the tax break and its ongoing implications for the future of the Tenderloin and Mid-Market highlight the dilemma planners and designers face today as innovative technologies disrupt places and urban systems at breathtaking speeds. “Move fast and break things”, an old Facebook company motto dating back to its founding in 2004, continues to hold relevance in the San Francisco start-up industry’s perception of the public realm, as exemplified by Uber’s recent legal scuffles with the State of California over autonomous vehicle regulations. San Francisco planners and policy makers once lived by this motto too during the heyday of urban renewal, and its disastrous effects on minorities, neighborhood character, and the City’s affordable housing stock are still felt today.
While the Tax Break does not expire until 2019, for all intents and purposes its CBAs are effectively defunct. In spring of 2017, the 11-member CAC had four vacant seats, and a quorum for a public meeting has not been reached since December of 2016. Without the ability to meet and review new CBAs from the participating companies, the City Administrator ultimately approves the agreements without any CAC feedback. In addition, three of the six participating companies have received approval for three-year agreements, effectively nullifying what little power the CAC had to review and critique new CBAs each year.

In analyzing the flows of money and volunteer hours distributed from companies to local nonprofits, clear patterns emerge. Organizations like St. Anthony’s, Glide, St. Vincent’s and Episcopal Community Services, receive the majority of funds and resources from the companies, while others like Hospitality House and the Gubbio Project, two organizations that locals often refer to in glowing words, received relatively little. These findings suggest that these CBAs are distinctly different than the development agreements extracted from luxury hotel projects in the 1970s and 1980s. Whereas those development agreements resulted in physical infrastructure determined by the community, companies participating in the Tax Break distribute funds based on their own philanthropic interests. The existing capacity, service types, and general prominence of some nonprofits makes them more attractive to companies while others that may be serving a vital need continue to fly under the radar.

**TACTICAL URBANISM AS PUBLIC PLANNING POLICY**

**Origins in San Francisco**

On the other end of the planning intervention spectrum from the Tax Break, are the City’s more recent tactical urbanism projects. Tactical urbanism advocates for the “immediate reclamation, redesign, or reprogramming of public space”, and it draws from Paul Davidoff’s critique of the mid-century planner as a technician rather than a true visionary capable of examining and debating political and social values (Lydon, Garcia, & Duany, 2015). At its most basic level, tactical urbanism is a way of expressing an idea for change within the physical environment via an emotional and human format that architectural drawings, reports, and even 3-d models cannot. While traditional city-making is a slow-moving process weighed down by development review, zoning codes, financing plans, and adverse political climates, tactical urbanism offers a chance for a quick test-drive of an intervention to see how the intervention operates in reality before dedicating time and resources to a typical planning process. Tactical urbanism projects can cover a wide spectrum of temporal scales, from a street festival that transforms a normal vehicular street into a pedestrian boulevard for a few hours, to more permanent plaza installations that reclaim parts of an overly large intersection for pedestrians. The common threads between these project types are the prioritization of the role people play in making public spaces vital spaces for cities, and the emphasis they place on iteration and adjustment of an intervention over time.
San Francisco’s relationship with tactical urbanism in 2017 is particularly strong, and dates back to 2006 when one of the earliest forms of this current tactical urbanism movement, Park(ing) Day, originated in San Francisco. What started as a purely grassroots, citizen-led experiment in reclaiming the public realm from vehicles for pedestrians, led to an entirely new way for City staff to work in the built environment. Today, teams of City staff from the Mayor’s Office, the Departments of City Planning and Public Works, and the Municipal Transit Agency all implement various forms of tactical urbanism projects and programs that range from the highly temporary (multi-hour street closures for events) to longer-term streetscape installations (plazas and parks), and everything in between. This overlap and collaboration between agencies was so great in fact, that in 2017 the City launched Groundplay, an umbrella program that unifies all of the various programs for the first time. Today, nearly all plans and programs emerging from the Department of City Planning incorporate some aspect of tactical urbanism or incremental piloting. In the century-long saga of the City Department of Planning’s history, one could title the current chapter, ‘The Tactical Urbanism Era’. As a strategy for planning and design, cheap, quick, pilot projects offer tremendous flexibility for introducing new ideas in public spaces to the people who use them most. They also offer a need for built-in, on-going monitoring that demands planners to be both creative and critical in their thinking, while also possessing more hands-on and technical skills. In comparison to the autocratic planner of the 1960s and 1970s, and the rational-comprehensive planner of the 1980s and 1990s, this current era for the City’s
planners is perhaps best defined as a pluralist approach where small-scale, quick-win interventions are prioritized equally with large-scale comprehensive strategies; and plans and designs are intentionally made flexible to ensure that growth and adaption over time take place as social needs and preferences change.

**Parklets, Pavement to Parks, and the Redistributions of Right-of-Way**

Today the parklet is a relatively ubiquitous streetscape element in American cities large and small. While specific formal and programmatic designs range, the core components of each parklet following the same general logic: take a parking space, and within that roughly 8-foot by 20-foot area, create a space for people that extends the boundaries of the pedestrian realm into the street. It is a platform for exhibiting various types of civic activation, ownership, and participation that has proved effective in both the grassroots, bottom-up context as well as through the efforts of city government.

The origins of the parklet date back to the 2005 concept of a San Francisco-based, activist-design group called Rebar. Through non-traditional and often whimsical approaches, Rebar explored new opportunities for infusing human-oriented, socially concerned projects into existing city forms. Behind every project was a design thinking strategy that reimagined how public space could be used, and how temporary (or “piloted”) strategies could better help people connect with the public spaces they inhabited.

Inspired by Gordon Matta Clarke’s Fake Estates exhibit of miniature leftover New York City parcels scattered throughout the city, in 2005 Rebar introduced its hybrid urbanism-activism art-installation, the PARK(ing) space. It was intended as a way to reclaim small patches of public space that had been designated for vehicles and give them back to people in the form of usable public open space by transforming a parking space into an actual 8-foot by 20-foot park with sod, park bench, a tree, and some decorative fencing. In part, the installation was a rebuke to the current state of highly rational urban planning in San Francisco that squelched opportunities for more incremental or creative approaches to open space creation at a neighborhood or block-level scale. The result was an immediate visualization of what people could gain if a single parking spot was reimagined for alternative use, without the aid of City Planning or other government review. At the end of the day, the park was packed up as quickly as it had been first installed—further accentuating its fleeting temporariness and inherent flexibility.

As images of the stunt trickled onto the Internet, urban academics and bloggers alike marveled at its simple genius and provocative message [Lydon et al., 2015] Rebar built off the overnight sensation and critical acclaim of the PARK(ing) space by releasing an open source manual to encourage others around the world to produce similar types of low-cost and/or free ‘parking spaces for people’. The grassroots message of the PARK(ing) Day Manual, that if given the right inspiration, anyone can create something special, proved transformative. In 2005 PARK(ing) Day was born as a world-wide event where for an entire day anyone could contribute to the collective demonstration of power system redistribution—both in terms of
transferring power within the street from cars to people, and also in terms of giving people within their community the power to transform their own built environments through quick, inexpensive, and completely legal means.

Looking to capitalize on the increased public interest in the public realm generated by Rebar’s work to boost its own on-going efforts to overhaul the look and function of the City’s streetscapes, the Department of City Planning, along with major support from the Mayor’s Office and Municipal Transportation Agency and the Department of Public Works, unveiled the Pavement to Parks Program. In part inspired by streetscape efforts taking place through New York City’s Department of Transportation under Janette Sadik-Kahn (Bela, 2015), Pavement to Parks integrated complete streets design standards with a pilot-project approach where changes to the built environment could be more iterative and evolutionary than normally allowed by a traditional government streetscape program (Pavement to Parks & City of San Francisco, 2015). Pavement to Parks worked with Rebar and local architect RG-Architecture to develop the next iteration of the Park(ing) spaces as more permanent installations of pedestrian streetscape ideals.

The result of this collaboration was a series of semi-permanent, modular sidewalk extension systems that were often designed pro-bono and built with salvaged or donated materials (Bela, 2015; Davidson, 2013). The City called them “parklets” and the process launched an entirely new way of generating public spaces that offered tremendous flexibility for public users as well as for the designers and on-going stewards of the space.

Despite its grassroots, bottom-up design origins, under the City’s control the parklet transitioned into a more top-down format. In 2013, the City published the first edition of its “San Francisco Parklet Manual”, which catered to local business and neighborhood commercial property owners looking to increase or diversify their foot traffic. Businesses would serve as the sponsors of the project by providing upfront design and installation costs, and would also be expected to serve as long-term stewards of the parklet and tending to its upkeep. As such, the guide largely focused on the permitting and installation steps from a business perspective, and the financial requirements that would be expected of each sponsor. In 2013, anticipated costs for the installation, permitting, and on-going review of a parklet included an assortment of fees that started at around $1,853 and could increase depending on the type and number of parking spaces occupied by the parklet. Design and installation fees could run between $7,000 and $12,000, and businesses were also expected to provide liability insurance for up to $1 million dollars (a typical requirement of San Francisco businesses with outdoor café seating). A conservative estimate would put the total upfront parklet cost at over $8,000—a sizeable investment for any local business, but likely out of reach for smaller businesses lacking the upfront capital necessary.

The investment and on-going involvement expected of these parklet sponsors raises questions about the role of the parklet as public space that Park(ing) Day did not. While the latter was an expression of public life in
public space through low-cost and citizen-led efforts, the former is decidedly commercial- and consumer-oriented in that it provides more space in public for people to perform activities like eating and drinking purchased goods from a local retailer. In looking to quickly redistribute proportions of the streetscape to favor pedestrians more and also skirt the slow, bureaucratic systems of traditional public realm design, Pavement to Parks looked to the business community to be the driver and promoter of their concept. The results are multi-faceted. With over fifty different parklets installed, the program has undoubtedly found success with the business community and the people who enjoy using these spaces. Even on a cloudy day, parklets are often filled with people drinking coffee or eating lunch. But the distribution of parklets across the city indicates that not all neighborhoods are able to participate in this form of public space reclamation, and the almost formulaic programmatic quality of the parklets (outdoor seating outside a café or restaurant) suggests that a certain business type has found a profitable way to extend their commercial reach beyond the interior and into the highly visible public realm.

The Tenderloin has no parklets, and also has limited quantities of open space. Its sidewalks double as the circulation space and as space for socializing and resting. The recently rehabilitated Boeddeker Park has nice sport courts, plantings, and seating options, but the park is designated for use by children and the elderly, and it occupies only a portion of a single block. While the parklet model proves successful at generating small patches of open space in more prosperous and thriving neighborhood retail corridors, in the Tenderloin, a neighborhood with proven pedestrian safety issues and an abundance of parking spaces, the lack of parklets indicates that this model for generating open space out of parking spaces is not one-size-fits-all. The Tenderloin presents an opportunity for different type of tactical urbanism that can translate to lower-income settings with limited local business capacity.

**Living Innovation Zones**

Like the parklet before it, the Living Innovation Zone (LIZ) grew from a desire to integrate different departments and agencies within the City to achieve more pedestrian-oriented and pedestrian-activated public realms. Beginning in 2013, the Mayor’s Office of Civic Innovation, Departments of City Planning and Public Works, and the San Francisco Arts Commission came together to build a program that could leverage the creativity and innovation of local designers, nonprofits and local community groups by funding them to create temporary public realm installations (Office of the Mayor, 2016). Part art installation incubator, part capital investment indicator test, the LIZ aimed to bring new ways for people to socialize and connect in the public realm—particularly in Mid-Market where dense housing and limited indoor common space increases the importance of the area’s public realm as a space for gathering and community building. Including the Sounds Commons installation at United Nations Plaza, there are four LIZ installations today, and more planned for the future.

In the case of the Sound Commons, LIZ partnered with the Exploratorium, a local
science and technology museum, to develop the concept and install it in United Nations Plaza. Acting as part of a larger effort to “activate and restore Civic Center as a destination for all”, at the core of this installation is a deeper desire by the City to infuse a plaza already highly utilized by both the homeless and by drug sellers and users, with programming that would draw in a different set of users and ostensibly improve the quality of the space. As a hotspot of crime, drug sales and use, and the various forms of lingering that homelessness breeds, the LIZ team pointed to the lack of consciously programmed space as a reason for the general derelict nature of the plaza. But within this relatively small planning and design type intervention, there is almost no sign of a community process or Tenderloin-specific consideration. In a press release heralding the arrival of the Sound Commons last June, Supervisor Jane Kim, whose district includes the Tenderloin, alluded to the particularly diverse nature of the area and the many different programmatic needs they present for a plaza.

“The investment coming into Central Market provides a real opportunity to begin transforming Civic Center’s public spaces into a destination that meets the needs of the remarkably diverse community that lives, works, visits and plays here” (Office of the Mayor, 2016).

While Mayor Lee, a noted Market Street revitalization advocate further impressed the notion that public spaces in the area to-date have not allowed for the right kinds of social interaction,
The revitalization of Central Market has been remarkable, and we will continue to build on this momentum. We will leverage the Sound Commons along with investments from the new Fix-It Teams to continue to create a destination that increases social interaction, improves public spaces and enhances the quality of life for everyone to enjoy” (Office of the Mayor, 2016).

Statements like Kim’s and Lee’s emphasize the relatively recent rise to power that quick-paced, creative public realm interventions have experienced in San Francisco, and the importance that politicians and planners have placed on these interventions for improving the quality of life for the users of a space. Whereas in past planning eras, the City and local business community would have spent years and millions of dollars to overhaul the physical condition of the plaza with defensive design techniques to root out undesirables, today, a quick and cheaper alternative is available. And yet a degree of similarity exists between the goals of the Sound Commons and those of urban renewal era projects like the Yerba Buena Center, for example. In the case of the Sound Commons, the design concept behind its programming was intended as an excuse for people to reconnect with one another and re-engage with their surrounding environments, and to serve as a metaphorical “wrecking ball for social norms” (Office of the Mayor, 2016). However, laced within this design concept and the statements from Supervisor Kim and Mayor Lee is a conscious desire to bring new users of Mid-Market, namely the roughly 11,000 tech company employees, into the public realm by offering them a platform for more productive and easy activation. This platform, while technically free and open to the public, offers a limited form of activation that is largely recreation and does not necessarily address any of the pre-existing needs of its long-time users. While tech employees can temporarily enjoy the chimes or xylophone at United Nations Plaza as a break from work and their indoor office environment, for many existing users of the plaza it is the expansive and largely un-programmed quality of the open space that provides much-needed refuge from prying eyes and aggressive security forces that monitor the more high-income and business-oriented areas of Downtown.

Temporary Private Sector Activations

In following a progression from more citizen-led, tactical urbanism to the more free-market, business approach, the temporary ground floor activation program used along Market Street highlights one of the most closely tied relationships that planners and business groups exhibit today in public realm activation—and the extent to which more flexible development approaches can circumvent rigid zoning protocols.

In 2013, two commercial real estate developers, Tidewater Capital and War Horse, purchased 1028 Market Street, a former pool hall and strip club that had sat vacant for over 10 years. Looking to build off of the excitement in Mid-Market generated by the Tax Break and agglomeration of technology start-ups, the
From its Market Street entrance, the Hall does not reveal much to the passerby of its interior activities.

Inside, the Hall functions like a small scale food court that attracts nearby tech employees.
development team hoped to construct a new 12-story mixed-use building with 10,000 square feet of ground floor retail and 186 housing units. Upon further inspection of the state of the neighborhood, it was clear to the team that leaving the vacant property in its current condition for another three or four years while the project went through Department of City Planning review would be a serious detriment to the future success of the project. Already a blighted, vacant stretch of Market Street that had become a hotspot for drug dealing, the property also shared a border with another site that was in the process of redeveloping as well—meaning that nearly two thirds of the entire block would continue to be dominated by blank facades and construction work for years. Tidewater Capital and War Horse, recognizing that this block was already not on the radar of tech workers in the area any likely would remain that way if ground floor uses on the block stayed empty, came to the City with a request. In the culture of piloting and iterative design, the development team wanted to try out an innovative way of activating their building temporarily as the project moved through the City’s development review process. By giving their future customers and tenants a reason to visit the block, they hoped that they could build an excitement for the project and instill an identity in the block that the future development could plug into several years in the future.

The development team came up with the idea of a temporary ground floor commercial use that could be set up with fairly minimal expense and generate revenue and pedestrian activity for the site over the next three to four years. This “super pop-up” would come to be known as The Hall, a vendor style market place and event space that could both cater to the people the developers hope to attract to their future development, and also allow local food retailers to pilot their own businesses in a no-frills setting without typical brick and mortar restaurant cost barriers. Successful food retailers could potentially be relocated to the new development upon completion, or other commercial retail locations around the neighborhood.

As a somewhat complex piloting experiment that involved creative solutions to existing City development review and zoning frameworks, 1028 Market required the support of a municipal planner who could partner with the development team on the sequencing of the pilot and connect them to local stakeholders. The idea for using the Hall to grow long-lasting and socially conscious relationships between the existing Tenderloin communities and the new tech community of Market Street is a tall order, particularly given the irony of vendors serving twelve-dollar sandwiches and salads around the corner from St. Anthony’s free meal dining room. To some extent, the Hall’s success is a reflection of its ability to serve as an extension of the private tech office realms that surround it. Despite its billing as a community space, lunch time in the Hall looks less like a cross-section of the Tenderloin and more like a gathering of Zendesk employees (which is easily verified by the matching jackets). The physical architecture of The Hall, with its largely opaque façade and wrought iron fence separating its outdoor dining space from the adjacent sidewalk through-zone also appears to discourage connectivity between the surrounding Tenderloin communities and those that can afford the services sold within its interior. As described by Ilana Lipsett, who was
hired by the developer team to “curate cultural activities” at The Hall, the community space component of the project was never really about solving bigger societal conundrums plaguing the area:

“It’s going to be about using food, music and art to bring people together and help them express themselves... It’s not going to change the cost of housing in San Francisco, but it could change the tenor of relationships between different populations” (J. Dineen, 2014).

As with other tactical urbanism efforts like the parklet and the LIZ installations, The Hall is not looking to solve income inequality and other demographic disparities within the City, but rather takes a hands-off approach and offers further spatial opportunities for different demographic groups to partition themselves from one another or lay claim to parts of the public realm by partaking in a more “productive” use. In refusing to address their direct and indirect relationships with gentrification issues in the Tenderloin as well as in the greater city, these new forms of planning and urban design intervention appear more suited to act as social mixing tools for people who share demographic backgrounds than with those who do not.
The following findings provide a snapshot of the Tenderloin filtered through relevant theoretical and planning practice lenses. They touch on observed indicators of permanence within the Tenderloin that have found ways to resist gentrification pressures, as well as indicators of forces of change already at work in the neighborhood. Together, these interpreted findings help to inform a new set of planning ideals that could bolster the Tenderloin in its mounting battle with gentrification presented by a powerful and growing tech economy in San Francisco.
AN AGGLOMERATION OF POVERTY

SOCIAL SERVICES WITH DEEP NEIGHBORHOOD ROOTS

A spatial analysis of the neighborhood's poverty conditions, observed homelessness, and known locations of social service providers and affordable housing units indicates an interconnected system that both attracts low-income people to the Tenderloin, and perpetuates the neighborhood's long-term dependence on these services. This network of services and urban forms includes a large stock of permanently affordable housing, some of it exhibiting serious neglect and disrepair; social service organizations that provide meals, shelter, drug and medical treatment, childcare and parental services, workforce development, and legal services; and nonprofit housing developers who both manage existing units and develop new ones. As the size of these nonprofits' operations have increased, so too have their abilities to serve more marginalized and vulnerable people. Yet, rather than expanding beyond the boundaries of the Tenderloin to other low-income neighborhoods within the city, they have doubled down on the neighborhood by investing in real estate and increasing their capacity to serve people specifically within the Tenderloin.

This pattern of agglomeration is not random, nor is it a recent phenomenon. The root of its existence in the Tenderloin dates back to zoning restrictions from the 1980s that both froze the scale and the programming of most of the building stock in the central core.
of the neighborhood, and ensured that much of it would remain in its low-rent condition. Over 30 years later, many nonprofit agencies have taken advantage of the lower rents and proximity to their user base by purchasing Tenderloin properties or signing on for long-term leases. In some cases, these building purchases and leases are funded by the City, which further compounds the incentive for nonprofits to continue operating in the neighborhood. However, these zoning restrictions provided virtually no incentives for existing property owners to continue to invest in their properties as the buildings themselves aged and the populations they housed grew increasingly more vulnerable and in need of greater services. The neighborhood has one of the highest proportions of SRO buildings that received more than 20 violations from the department of health, including issues related to pests, mold, refuse, and sanitation, as well as structural conditions (San Francisco Department of Public Health, 2016). The result is a neighborhood filled with properties that are either actively financed to house low-income people or, by way of disinvestment and neglect, they attract a low-income tenant base.

Total Eviction Notices Per Building Between 2011 and 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Over 20 notices</th>
<th>11 to 20 notices</th>
<th>6 to 10 notices</th>
<th>2 to 5 notices</th>
<th>1 notice</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Height Limit Restriction</strong></td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Historic District</strong></td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tax Break Area</strong></td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
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This structured, decades long agglomeration within the neighborhood created a patchwork of relatively protected buildings and parcels that to an extent will protect the neighborhood from the types of whole-block urban renewal gentrification efforts that characterized the 1970s and 1980s. However, today recent examples in San Francisco indicate that entire block acquisition is not a necessity for gentrification. Parcel by parcel turnover, and incremental market-rate rehabilitations, can also lead to neighborhood-wide displacement. In San Francisco, where local rent control laws give significant rights to tenants, eviction attempts reached a ten-year high in 2015 as property owners eager to cash in on a rampant real estate market sought to turn rent controlled units over to the free market (Varma, 2016). And even if buildings like the SROs are protected from conversion, there is no requirement that building owners rent all of their units at once. Today, affordable housing advocates in the neighborhood are seeing higher rates of private SRO owners that are legally removing tenants, going off the market for a period, and then reemerging as higher-end short-term vacation rentals or short-term housing for students and tech workers, all of which is perfectly legal through existing legislation due to some particular loopholes around what constitutes “short-term” (Goldman, 2017).

Displacement itself is a multifaceted condition. Some argue that residents can experience the emotional sensations of displacement without being physically uprooted from their homes. With the growing abundance of tech-oriented housing, retail, and entertainment services both within and around the Tenderloin, original residents are left with a sensation that Detroit community activist George N’Namdi refers to as “psychological displacement”, or the diminished sense of self within one’s own neighborhood when recent changes “give you the illusion or sense that it’s not yours any longer” (N’Namdi, 2014).
From a programmatic standpoint, the continued agglomeration of poverty-related services is further illustrated by the channels of corporate giving the Tax Break created between Mid-Market companies and major Tenderloin nonprofit organizations. Intended as a way to leverage resources from wealthy companies for the Tenderloin, the CBAs have largely been used as fundraising mechanisms for established organizations like Glide Memorial Church and St. Anthony's. These organizations use their profits to increase the capacity of their critical care services by feeding, clothing, sheltering, and providing medical services to an even greater number of people in their Tenderloin facilities.

This phenomenon of an ever-growing social service industry that must continue to serve even more people to support its own goals as a company, is how many have come to describe the term "nonprofit industrial complex". In part out of an effort to fill the void left by the dismantling of the welfare state, nonprofits emerging during the rise of neoliberalism began to understand the large stake their industry had in the continued presence of homelessness as a problem to be profited from, or as Willse writes,

"In taking on population management of various categories, including "the homeless", as their institutional purpose, nonprofit industries leave in place the social, economic, and political conditions that produce massive inequality and diminished life chances in the first place." (Willse, 2015)
While the continued growth of Glide and St. Anthony's, along with housing developers like the Tenderloin Housing Clinic and Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation helps sustain many services and systems that Tenderloin residents desperately rely on, it has also created a built environment of urban fortresses, much like the tech company fortresses along Market Street, that bring thousands of people through their doors daily, and significantly impact the social life within their surrounding public realms. However, unlike the Mid-Market companies, many of these nonprofits are land owners or long-term lessees with proven interests in expanding their services and footprints in the Tenderloin. Their business models, as such, are inextricably tied to the continued existence of the Tenderloin as a low-income neighborhood. By comparison, the tech companies are not beholden to Mid-Market. For many, their location in the neighborhood today, or San Francisco in general, is related to current real estate trends, and a driving desire to be close to the 'heart' of the action in one of the world's most productive technology centers. Yet, these conditions are not long-term, and in the entire lifespan of a city, San Francisco's five-year reign as the technology capital of the world is quite small. Even Twitter, the second-largest employer in San Francisco and the flagship company of the Mid-Market corridor, will not see direct increases in its profits as a result of improvements to the Mid-Market or Tenderloin neighborhoods, and sudden changes in the company could necessitate an immediate departure from its 1355 Market Street fortress. In August of 2016, the company listed nearly one-quarter of its entire office space for sublease, a potential indication of larger financial woes.

**AGGLOMERATION AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR LONGER-TERM LOW-INCOME NEIGHBORHOOD EMPOWERMENT**

Despite the clear issues that the convoluted agglomeration of poverty-related systems and forms in the Tenderloin present, agglomeration could also bring new opportunities for positive and more equitable outcomes. The proven density of services and platforms for helping and serving low-income people in the neighborhood means that it is already a natural epicenter for the physical and human interactions that serve as the building blocks of real community. In reference to Chicago's Hull House, one of the earliest models of social work and supportive housing in the country, Mindy Thompson Fullilove writes,

"It is that process—getting to know one another—that is the foundation of the community life. It is the essential transaction. If there is no exchange, there is no community. If there is no place for exchange, the community is thwarted in its development... Every community—no matter how rich or how poor—needs a Hull House, an institution designed for gathering, where people can learn whatever it is they need to learn in order to go forward into the ever-changing future. We are all immigrants into the future, and we need the help that Hull House has to offer" (Fullilove, 2004).
Additionally, the density of institutional knowledge in the Tenderloin, with its multi-decade history of neighborhood activism, is an important attribute of the neighborhood that speaks to its long-term ability to resist widespread displacement and restructuring. Unlike the dismantling that historically poor minority neighborhoods in the City like Western Addition and SoMa faced in the middle of the 20th Century, the Tenderloin was largely left alone to grow its nonprofit community. Many of these nonprofits which began as fledgling idealists are now multi-million dollar nonprofit enterprises that play a major role in housing low-income people on behalf of the City, and in securing funds to construct new affordable units. Recent efforts by low-income housing development organizations and District 6 Supervisor Jane Kim to extract additional units of affordable housing and in-lieu fees from for-profit developers building along Mid-Market illustrate the success that targeted development agreements can yield for a neighborhood, and the difference that political savviness and inroads with City Hall makes.

San Francisco’s 2016 fourth quarter development pipeline indicates that 72 new units of affordable housing are planned for the Tenderloin. While this figure will do little to correct the poverty induced conditions that course through the Tenderloin, it is a start towards leveling the balance between high-end and low-income housing in the neighborhood, and in securing new permanently affordable units as private SROs become increasingly uninhabitable or lost to market-rate speculation. However, as a long-term tool for leveraging benefits, this development agreement tactic relies heavily on specific contexts of a project, and the capacity of a developer to meet the demands of the neighborhood. The ongoing development agreements taking place in Mid-Market and the Tenderloin are not unlike the events that played out in the 1970s and 1980s with the Union Square luxury hotels, when activists ultimately recognized that for-profit development was inevitable, and thus leveraging as much as possible from the developer was the only viable solution.

Out of this constant project-by-project battle for development concessions comes a power imbalance that continuously pits deep-pocketed developers against skilled but short-handed nonprofits who must also focus their energies on serving Tenderloin residents that already live in the neighborhood. Further, while development agreements help create new units of affordable housing, they do nothing for the existing stock that continues to fall further into disrepair. This scenario suggests an opening for planning and design to build off the existing agglomeration of both poverty-related services and the institutional knowledge of nonprofits and community groups and create future development incentives that specifically leverage funds and resources from market-rate developers into the maintenance and rehabilitation of existing housing stock, particularly the SRO buildings. As the existing housing stock for many existing and long-time residents of the Tenderloin, these structures cultivate and sustain vital members of the Tenderloin’s public life ecosystem. Previous attempts through zoning regulations have preserved the external shells of SRO building, yet the quality of internal conditions and programming is largely unprotected. A more meaningful preservation of SROs would bolster the core of the neighborhood where these buildings agglomerate, and would bring investment to a population of residents that already provide tremendous value to the Tenderloins’ public realm.
Making Sense of the Tenderloin

THRIVING PUBLIC LIFE WITHIN A RESTRICTED PUBLIC REALM

PUBLIC LIFE PLURALISM AND SIDEWALKS

Despite its reputation as a wild and out-of-control slum, the Tenderloin has a remarkably tight-knit, vibrant, and meaningful array of public life that simultaneously showcases the most valuable qualities of urban neighborhoods and the most unconscionable. The fact that serious crime, drug activity, and general human suffering can exist on sidewalks that also host children playing, neighbors listening to music together, and people barbecuing, suggests that vibrant public life and societal strife are not always mutually exclusive within a single neighborhood. That the Tenderloin's streets can exhibit both crime and empowering human interactions, violence and creativity, poverty and beauty, demonstrates the depths of its pluralism.

This neighborhood pluralism is closely tied to both the physical and programmatic qualities of the built environment. Streets with SROs featured some of the highest sidewalk use by people presumed to have more stable living arrangements. With SROS serving as some of the smallest legal living units in the city, sidewalks provide a necessary form of open space and a stage for socialization for those living in isolating and confined SRO units. Like sheriffs of the block, these SRO "street watchers" generally discouraged more elicit types of behavior in proximity of their SRO's domain, such as drug activity and larger groups of street dwellers. Similarly, sidewalk use around larger nonprofit service providers like Glide Memorial Church and St. Anthony's waxed and waned depending on the organization's meal service schedule and whether or not their staff was present on the street. In the hours leading up to and during a meal service, the nonprofit's internal services would spill out into the public realm, with larger groups of people sitting and lying on the sidewalks. The presence of nonprofit staff within the public realm delivered the message that this space was rightfully claimed by the diners, and alternate activities would have to go elsewhere. Following the dining period, the control of the adjacent nonprofit diminished.
and the sidewalk returned to a more contested space.

These findings indicate that despite a lack of overt design interventions in the public realm, Tenderloin residents, housed or otherwise, find ways to program and organize space, even small scraps of it, to suit their various needs throughout the day. This space or "connective tissue", as Margaret Crawford describes it,

"...binds daily life together, amorphous and so persuasive that it is difficult even to perceive. In spite of its ubiquity, everyday space is nearly invisible in the professional discourses of the city" (Crawford, 1999).

And while sidewalks, parking lanes, and crosswalks are technically public, the ways in which they are claimed or regulated by different neighborhood users throughout the course of a day or a week results in new meanings of ownership and identity (Crawford, 1999).

The user's claim to everyday space can be fleeting, like the SRO resident sitting for an hour or two outside her building entrance or the dining crowds waiting outside St. Anthony's. It can also extend for months or years, as evidenced by a thriving drug trade taking place in front of a boarded-up building on Hyde Street. With more traditional planning metrics and data collection methods, these types of activations of space would likely go undetected, yet they are crucial components of the structure of the neighborhood, and they offer helpful insights into what large-scale planning efforts over the last 40 years in the neighborhood have failed to account for.

STREET DESIGN AND GENTRIFICATION

The physical design of the Tenderloin's streets offers additional clues for how change is currently happening in the Tenderloin, and where opportunities for a new tack exist. To-date, while the existing streetscape design of the neighborhood seems to encourage some forms of public life, it also makes other activities exceedingly more difficult—sometimes intentionally so. As mentioned previously, the neighborhood hosts an abundance of street watching and engaged sidewalk behavior that evokes Jane Jacobs' 'eyes on the street' ideal. The 11-foot-wide sidewalks are generally wide enough for small clusters of social gathering while still allowing pedestrian circulation to pass. Yet the lack of public street furniture in the neighborhood has resulted in a limited set of venues for sidewalk street watching. Those who live in an SRO or other residential building with a lobby entrance and overhang have an ideal arrangement for street watching, but others must resign themselves to leaning against a building wall, or sitting on the curb, a parked car, or even a bicycle rack. Tellingly, these relatively new bicycle racks—a mainstay of current complete streets design standards—were never observed with an actual bicycle locked to them.

Beyond the sidewalks, there are other elements of the streetscape that betray the true intentions of its design. Sixteen-foot travel lanes and one-way traffic directions creates an imbalanced street environment where relatively low-profile, residential apartment buildings bordered urban expressways with traffic barreling down the street well beyond the posted 25 miles-per-hour. This imbalance is further magnified when considering that the Tenderloin has the lowest rate of car ownership in the city and yet some of its most dangerous streets for pedestrians (Juan Carlos Cancino et al., 2015). Today, the City is
Looking to address these safety and mobility imbalance issues within the Tenderloin by focusing on traffic calming strategies that would eliminate travel lanes, reduce crossing distances, add bike lanes, and potentially widen sidewalks and convert one-way streets to two-way. As described in the 2015 Central Market Tenderloin Strategy, these proposed streetscape changes seem oriented towards improving public mobility flows, but not necessarily improving public gathering within the public realm. Further, they appear to also promote a set of standardized mobility ideals that may not be right for the Tenderloin and could unnecessarily spur gentrification. Do residents of the Tenderloin need bicycle lanes to improve their current mobility? Who else would make use of these bike lanes besides Tenderloin residents? How will these lanes benefit existing neighborhood residents directly, as opposed to simply providing surrounding neighborhoods with better access to Mid-Market?
LONG-TERM LAND OPERATORS AS STEWARDS OF THE STREET

In the Tenderloin, every block has a collection of parcels that are relatively "protected" from substantially physical or programmatic change in the near future. These include parcels either owned by or under long-term leases with nonprofit housing providers, including SROs and other types of affordable housing. Similarly, there are known nonprofit organizations with Tenderloin properties that are unlikely to vacate their current space or dramatically reduce their programming. Due to substantial financial backing and a long-term investment strategies in the neighborhood, these organizations are inextricably tied to the Tenderloin's conditions. Organizations like Glide Memorial Church, the Gubbio Project, and St. Anthony's all own, or have made substantial investments into the physical developments they operate within. Given that these property owners and tenants are invested in the long-term operational use of the public realms that surround their buildings, these particular sections of public realm offer key opportunities to introduce new kinds of infrastructure or programming in places where capacity for stewardship is high.

The concept of introducing public infrastructure in places with the existing private sector capacity to support the maintenance of the infrastructure is already a common theme in the City's tactical urbanism portfolio, as Groundplay's project description alludes to:

"Groundplay projects begin with ordinary San Franciscans with ideas for their neighborhoods—not someone in a government planning office. Once a person contacts us, we look at which government, business, and civic groups can provide funding and other forms of support (such as design services). This grassroots process sidesteps a lot of the time-consuming (and costly) bureaucratic red tape of formal, top-down government planning projects, while building community ties and enhancing local stewardship" (Groundplay, n.d.).

With its generous right-of-ways, a density of nonprofits to serve as stewards, and the City’s existing commitment to community-driven piloting techniques, there is potential in the Tenderloin for new types of public realm activation that could be low-cost, incremental, and most importantly—empowering for existing Tenderloin populations. By using existing road space to provide flexible seating options, raised beds for gardening or other urban greening installations, and various mobile services like Lava Mae and Pit Stop, the people who use the Tenderloin’s public realm could be given more opportunities to claim it as their own and make it a more humane space. As evidenced by the lack of public benches and restrooms in both the Tenderloin and neighboring Civic Center and SoMa, the City's traditional design response to homelessness has been to remove public infrastructure and
condemn those without private alternatives to the sidewalk.

Meanwhile, tactical urbanism projects like the parklet have brought new open space to the street but oftentimes as an extension of the adjacent private realm and in neighborhoods where thriving local commercial businesses are already thriving. For the low-income communities living in these neighborhoods the resulting message is clear: the underlying poverty of your neighborhood negates your right to quality neighborhood amenities. However, recent Tenderloin public realm improvements at Boeddeker Park, and the privately funded Lava Mae mobile bathroom units, clearly demonstrate how infrastructure that is properly cared for with the right balance of stewardship and respect for its users can succeed in low-income communities. In the Tenderloin where widespread streetscape infrastructure changes are necessary but the vulnerability to gentrification is great, changes to the public realm should not be at the expense of existing users. Further, streetscape changes do not only have to target future investors with the promise of higher land values following installation. Instead, targeted interventions within the public realm that envision the public realm not solely as a framework for circulation but rather as a platform on which multiple publics can meet their daily needs, can elevate the role of design in this complicated neighborhood.
POCKETS OF PRIVATE SURPLUS SPACE

Observations of street life in the neighborhood also revealed the inclination for street dwelling and more dangerous or illegal forms of street life activity to take place on blocks or sections of blocks where buildings showed minimal signs of ground floor activity or were boarded up. In some cases, boarded buildings were an indication of a forthcoming development project, however as exhibited by 1028 Market Street and the Hall, development review for a larger project is a lengthy, multi-year process. In cases where an entire block is boarded up for larger projects, the effects can be particularly damaging to the life of the adjacent public realm.

While the purpose of the “super pop-up” Hall was to attract nearby tech workers to an otherwise nondescript, boarded up block and temporarily hold their interest while the review process for the ultimate project was underway, there are elements of this concept that appear applicable to the Tenderloin’s low-income context and should be further explored. As of March 2017, 18 different affordable housing projects were proposed for the core area of the Tenderloin, of which three are proposed to replace vacant lots or buildings not currently used as housing. For some of these projects, like the 41-unit 180 Jones Street, the review process will be lengthy. These vacant lots and buildings present new opportunities for Tenderloin-specific social service, economic development, recreation, and cultural piloting that could begin to alter the existing neighborhood form into one that is more aligned with the values and needs of those who occupy it most. The Hall illustrates the larger issue with democratic distribution of surplus space where the right to the city, as described by David Harvey, “is too narrowly confined, restricted in most cases to small political and economic elite who are in a position to shape cities more and more after their own desires.” The Tenderloin has surplus land, but it has not yet had the ability to assert community control over it.
Underutilized interior and exterior spaces dot the neighborhood.
From these findings, a recurring theme of impermeable rigidity in urban form versus small, flexible moments of innovation emerges. The driving forces of change in the Tenderloin have traditionally been wide-reaching acts of policy like the SRO Conversion Ordinance, or a select number of powerful nonprofit organizations constructing large developments. As a result, these forces have checkered the neighborhood with vast immobile forms and systems that have allowed the Tenderloin to avoid some aspects of gentrification, while also ensuring a continuation of disinvestment and containment. The findings of this thesis suggest that within these immobile forms and systems an abundance of vital and resilient public life exists. The neighborhood’s public life occupies a restricted public realm with limited outlets for true expression of ownership or control, but there is room for expansion and reclamation. While sidewalks already serve as a daily part of Tenderloin residents’ lives, the street is allocated mainly to a population of drivers that do not live within the neighborhood. By reclaiming pieces of the public realm for occupation by people, the neighborhood would generate new spaces and platforms for infusing its own values into the Tenderloin’s urban form. The City’s current planning and design philosophy around tactical urbanism and piloting provides an essential framework for streetscape reclamation that could be adapted for the needs of the Tenderloin. Further, the existence of surplus private space that is slated for affordable housing development but several years removed from actual development, offers additional opportunities for the people who occupy the Tenderloin—as opposed to the nonprofits—to lay more claim to the shapes and systems that character its urban form. Given these contexts, the following proposals serve as potential design frameworks in which future public realm and tactical urbanism work could be applied to the Tenderloin.
The overall rigidity of the existing neighborhood's form is perpetuated by rigid zoning, rigid ownership, rigid buildings, and a rigid set of clienteles. While this had deferred large scale redevelopment of the Tenderloin for many decades, it has also prevented the occurrence of necessary improvements to its built environment, such as the restoration of 100-year-old structures and public realm investments by way of development agreements. Given the relatively high proportion of units in that neighborhood that are "permanently" affordable through ownership or long-term leasing by nonprofits and City agencies, the neighborhood will likely continue to be a place that houses a vulnerable population for the foreseeable future. But for others who call this neighborhood home and live in more tenuously affordable units—the working class, the immigrants, the families—there is more imminent risk for further degradation of residential unit quality or outright displacement. The preservation of existing SROs and other rent-stabilized units in the Tenderloin is essential for sustaining neighborhood culture and vitality. While more streamlined inspections of SRO units by both the Departments of Public Health and Building Inspection have identified particular problem areas in the Tenderloin, the City should take a more decisive next step and look to secure funding for the actual repair and ongoing maintenance of these protected structures.
Presently, there are four conditions within the Tenderloin defined by distinct policy tools that control the potential for change within any given Tenderloin lot: the 80-Foot Height Limit area, the Uptown Tenderloin Historic District area, the Tax Break, and lots with protected SRO units. As policy tools, they have preserved the physical forms of the Tenderloin remarkably well. Yet recent eviction notice rate increases in the Tenderloin since the Tax Break began in 2011 indicate that these tools do not offer complete immunity from market forces. By further abstracting the frequency of eviction notices within the different boundaries of these policy tools, a more helpful pattern emerges. First, evictions notices within the Uptown Tenderloin Historic District appear to blanket the entire area, save for a small portion in the southeastern quadrant of the district. Nearly every block appears to have been touched by at least one eviction notice. When looking solely at eviction notice locations compared to the boundaries of the 80-foot height limit lots, notices appear to consolidate more within the center of the core Tenderloin area, where housing units are more abundant. When looking solely at the Tax Break Area, the total number of buildings effected by eviction notices drops, yet the density of notices within single buildings increases, suggesting a recurring pattern of eviction within key sites.

This finding is particularly relevant given that the vast majority of new residential development proposed for the Tenderloin is within the boundaries of the Tax Break area. In San Francisco, market rate developers must adhere to the City's Inclusionary Housing Program, which requires the provision of either on-site affordable units (between 120 and 25 percent of all units) or off-site units.
Encouraging Everyday Urbanism in the Tenderloin

Existing Policy Tools Dictating the Potential for Change in the Tenderloin

Legend:
- Uptown Tenderloin Historic District
- 80-Foot Height Limit
- Tax Break Area
- 80-Foot Height Limit + Tax Break Area
- Tax Break Area + Protected SROs
- 80-Foot Height Limit + Protected SROs
- 80-Foot Height Limit + Tax Break Area + Protected SROs
- Protected SROs
Chapter 5

Existing SRO and Affordable Unit Lot Locations

Patchwork pattern of new affordable units leaves SRO units untouched

Proposed New Residential Unit Locations

Incremental Phasing of Rehabilitations and Additions to Existing SRO Buildings
to be determined by City officials and local NPOs (between 20 to 33 percent of all units). As it exists today, this policy presents a flawed scenario for the Tenderloin, where market-rate development along its borders is both helping to ensure new affordable development within the neighborhood, and also helping to drive up land values and consequently encourage land owners to seek a range of loopholes for evicting low-income tenants. Meanwhile, nearly all SROs, both NPO-operated and privately owned, sit in a sort of development purgatory, where the cost of the renovations the existing building demands outweigh the revenue the rentals generate. This scenario presents an ideal opportunity for a new kind of SRO zoning overlay that would aim to accomplish what the original SRO Conversion Ordinance did not. Rather than funnel all on-site inclusionary requirements from market-rate developers to new affordable developments, the City should create the option for developers to finance the rehabilitation of existing SRO housing stock in the Tenderloin that would elevate the quality of existing units to a level that existing residents deserve. In some cases, buildings should be remodeled to include new stories that would increase the overall housing stock density without requiring the procurement of new land.

By prioritizing the rehabilitation of existing housing stock in the Tenderloin, existing residents, particularly those not currently housed by local NPOs, would see more direct benefits for their own lives should the economic success of both the Mid-Market corridor and San Francisco at large continue.
RECLAIM THE TACTICAL URBANISM BRAND FOR THE TENDERLOIN

The City is already actively engaged in rebranding tactical urbanism with a 'San Francisco flavor' through the creation of its new cross-department program Groundplay. However, more explicit language and design intention should be used for such projects in the Tenderloin. At its core, tactical urbanism has always been about standing up to conventional planning practices that do not favor the user, and offering tangible solutions that can evolve and grow over time. It is also about equity and recognizing when existing planning strategies create imbalances within the city. The fact that the concept has been gentrified to the point where parklets are synonymous with $5 dollar lattes is not necessarily a fault of tactical urbanism itself. Oftentimes, tactical urbanism is introduced in places with an abundance of space but a lack of programming to guide people through it. In the Tenderloin, the opposite holds true. The neighborhood has a critical need for space that can hold the abundance of public life and social program it sustains.

Off-street, private properties could provide more targeted or resource intensive activations that address particular problems faced by existing residents within succinct time periods. Further, they could offer space for Tenderloin-based organizations to develop their own solutions for addressing neighborhood needs through lower risk, lower investment strategies. The following examples illustrate the range of themes and scales in which reclamation of surplus space can occur:

- **Storage:** With relatively little expense, a portion of a vacant lot or building could be used for storage of personal belongings—freeing the homeless or marginally housed from the burden of carrying their belongings at all times on their person.

- **Shelter:** While sleeping on sidewalks is not the ideal for most, it is inevitable in the Tenderloin when more suitable private options are unavailable. Temporary shelters are already in place at St. Boniface Church by way of the local nonprofit, the Gubbio Project. During the day when Mass is not in session, the pews of St. Boniface are made available for anyone to come and sleep or rest.

- **Hygiene:** Mobile programming like Lava Mae and Pit Stop demonstrate that brick and mortar development isn’t a necessity for creating dignified, high-quality hygiene stations. Clusters of mobile hygiene stations could assemble on a single lot to offer a variety of services throughout the day, much like how the Off the Grid food trucks operate at UN Plaza. Or, if existing water hook-ups exist on-site, a more permeant set of temporary structures could be installed.

- **Open Space:** While the neighborhood’s children have the newly renovated, high-quality Boeddeker Park, older residents lack off-street open spaces. A temporary open space could offer recreation amenities and gardening, or it could have more limited programming.

- **Technology and workforce training:** For sites that contain vacant buildings, interior space could be used for a variety of different workforce and skilled labor training programs, either as a computer
Types of Potential Temporary Activation for Underutilized Buildings or Lots

- *Shipping containers as pop-up storage or medical kiosk*
- *Kiosk serving free grab-and-go meals*
- *Job training/tech center pop-up station*
- *Mini sleeping pods for singles or families*
- *Safe and off-street area for resting*
- *Indoor sport courts*
- *Indoor area for resting*

**Arts and Culture space:** Today the Tenderloin harbors over 200 artists and performers within its boundaries [Brown, 2015], but has few places within the public realm to showcase them. Successful pilots could be integrated into the finished building, or relocated elsewhere in the neighborhood, and local companies could plug into the programs as well through funding or volunteer support. In pointedly designating spaces that low-income people have expressed a desire for, temporary activations could offer quick, tangible change in a neighborhood with limited surplus space.
Chapter 5

PROMOTE STREETSCAPE PLURALISM

In her study of the vibrant but contentious public life of Ho Chi Minh City's sidewalks, Kim explores the possibility of sidewalks that cater to many uses at once, much like mixed-use development patterns already do:

"It is now commonly thought that old-fashioned Euclidian zoning that imposes a constant, single land use type and the separation of land uses thwarts lively urban life. As a result, more cities zone "mixed-use" buildings where commercial and residential uses may occupy different floors. How about a "mixed-use" public space? Could we have a mixed-use sidewalk? Might it be more optimal to have more variety that selecting only one use for our increasingly precious public space that trumps others, all the time. Given the increasing density and heterogeneity of our cities, we need to develop more flexible and adaptive public space regimes." (Kim, 2015)

Kim's assertion rings true in the Tenderloin, where existing streetscape and public realm plans treat sidewalks like roads for people—simply infrastructure for moving from one point to another. Neighborhoods like the Tenderloin present crucial opportunities to develop new street design practices that go beyond mobility
Encouraging Everyday Urbanism in the Tenderloin

2. Long-term land holder status

3. Observed gathering behavior

Existing Protected Housing Type Locations

Observed Gathering Locations
and embrace the role of sidewalks and streets as dedicated forms of open space. While the Tenderloin lacks large amounts of open space, it has wide streets, ample sidewalks, and a land use and demographic mix that encourages walking trips. Building from this context, new designs for the Tenderloin’s sidewalks and streets could take on a pluralism approach, where both mobility ideals and open space ideals could be meshed into a single public realm. Streetscape standards for the Tenderloin could encourage this pluralism, and could offer targeted approaches for different blocks dependent on the existence of long-term land uses or building owners. By locating certain types of interventions where ownership change is less likely to occur, these tactical urbanism installations could become new extensions of social service organizations or SROs.

The result of these design ideals for the Tenderloin’s public realm could be a new type of complete street, where ‘complete’ refers not only to the types of motilities served, but the types of stationary uses served.
Encouraging Everyday Urbanism in the Tenderloin

Incremental Network of Reclaimed Open Spaces

Nonprofit and Private SR0s

- More permanent open space installment
- Movable furniture for comfortable street watching

SR0 and Rent-Controlled Residential

- Small open space with less maintenance
- Mobile play areas for children and families
CONCLUSIONS

This research indicates that while the Tenderloin is indeed a conflicted and embattled neighborhood, it is also a neighborhood with options going forward and the potential for change. In the forty plus years since NOMPC activists rallied the neighborhood to fight against the proliferation of high-end hotels on its eastern border, the Tenderloin has been dealt a series of restrictive, district-wide policy blows that prevented large-scale gentrification from taking root while also perpetuating a cycle of disinvestment that ensured a long-term dependence of its populous on nonprofit service organizations. Yet the rigidity that ensued from these zoning efforts was largely confined to the private realms. Today, the Tenderloin’s sidewalks and streets serve as the only readily available open space in the neighborhood, and they are widely used for a variety of different purposes. At a period in time when tactical urbanism and streetscape innovation are driving the ideals behind the public realm work of multiple City agencies—and yet oftentimes resulting in outputs geared towards higher-income users—the Tenderloin presents a new opportunity for tactical urbanism to return to its roots and administer the design of more equitable public realms that serve the needs of a diverse, marginalized set of users.

In analyzing the existing urban form of the neighborhood, this thesis finds that the Tenderloin is a neighborhood with an abundance of small lots that have largely withstood market pressures for consolidation and redevelopment. While a few outlier megastructures dot the neighborhood, the dominant typology of the Tenderloin continues to be that of the 5- to 7-story, human scale mixed-use residential building, which is coincidentally reminiscent of the “moderate” density encouraged by both 1960s anti-Urban Renewal advocates like Jane Jacobs and Jan Gehl, as well as more contemporary theorists like New Urbanism’s Andres Duany. While the lack of redevelopment interest in the Tenderloin throughout the mid- to late-1900s contributed to its continued decline into the extreme poverty
it exhibits today, it also ensured that nonprofits, community activists, immigrants, musicians, the homeless, and other marginalized groups could find footholds in the neighborhood and carve out individual territories. In the case of the nonprofits, some grew into major political players as both neighborhood land owners and service contractors for various City agencies.

As described by Moudon, a neighborhood defined by small lots, like the Tenderloin, “belongs to many different and small groups, who can influence the way the environment is designed, maintained, and managed (Moudon, 1986). With 86 different social service providers operating out of the Tenderloin today, Moudon’s concept is particularly relevant for the Tenderloin given that nearly half of its parcels are owned or operated by nonprofit or government services with deep financial roots in the neighborhood. In all likelihood the most feasible option for future change in the Tenderloin will be at an incremental, parcel by parcel scale that bends to these existing long-time land holders. To a degree, this kind of incremental, small-scale change that weaves in and around institutional strongholds is a benefit to the Tenderloin. It has the potential to allow for more local control over the look and character of the neighborhood, given that small-lot changes do not require the same master-planning and overt design interventions that full-block or partial-block urban design interventions do.

In reclaiming tactical urbanism from its present-day hipster connotation and instead using it to mold the public realm into a more just and useful place for low-income or homeless people, the Tenderloin has an opportunity to once again brand itself as a different kind of San Francisco neighborhood. Similarly, the patchwork pattern of more easily modified parcels across the neighborhood suggests that the “bones” of the Tenderloin are built to withstand traditional large-block gentrification efforts and instead are well-suited to facilitate parcel-by-parcel, incremental change that aligns more seamlessly with the exiting rhythms of the neighborhood’s built and social forms.
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