Chapter Two

Waterfront Urban Design

Urban design addresses the physical character and built environment of a city. Good urban design reinforces the visual and sensory relationship of an urban area and the physical relationships that give character to a city. It concerns both preservation and development, and the fitting together of pieces with appropriate scale and visual interest, without unsettling contrasts. Urban design incorporates our cultural heritage and values things that explain our past. In the end, good urban design should help make a city efficient, safe, healthy, enjoyable, and valued by its residents.

The Design & Access Element is an effort to recognize the positive attributes of the San Francisco Waterfront, conserve and enhance these attributes, and improve the physical character of the waterfront where it is less than adequate. It defines the qualities that make the San Francisco waterfront a glorious edge to a great City, and provides direction for the physical form of development and open spaces envisioned in the Waterfront Plan.

Waterfront Design & Access Goals

The unique character of the San Francisco waterfront derives from a rich mix of urban activities, variety of views and open spaces, cohesive historic context, and extraordinary natural setting. The Design & Access Element seeks to ensure that this unique waterfront character is preserved and enhanced as waterfront revitalization occurs. Towards this end, the Design & Access Element takes a comprehensive approach to identifying how public access and open space and views will be maintained, enhanced and expanded, in ways which are sensitive to existing urban patterns and historic waterfront resources. This Element also includes design criteria specific to geographic segments (“subareas”) and individual sites along the waterfront. As new development occurs along the waterfront, the following three goals will guide the enhancement of the waterfront as a public asset.

Reunite the City with the Waterfront. This is the overarching goal of the Waterfront Plan and this Design & Access Element. The waterfront is an asset that has evolved from maritime industrial uses to a variety of maritime and public serving recreation and open space, business, and commercial uses. From the late 1800’s to the early 1900’s the waterfront was the physical and economic center of the City’s bustling transportation and trade activities. Subsequent technological and infrastructure changes, such as the transition to container shipping and construction of the Embarcadero Freeway, caused San Franciscans to turn their backs to the waterfront. Today, the removal of the Embarcadero Freeway and its redesign as an urban boulevard with transit and pedestrian improvements, have rekindled the public’s desire to enjoy the waterfront. The Waterfront Plan sets forth land use policies which continue to give priority to maritime uses, but also promote public, cultural and commercial activities which activate and draw people to the waterfront and provide strong visual and physical connections to surrounding neighborhoods. It is in this way that the Waterfront
Plan will guide reunification of the City and the waterfront. The policies and design criteria in this Element address how the design and location of new development, new public access and open spaces, protection and expansion of views, and preservation of historic resources will help achieve this goal.

Create a continuously accessible waterfront from Aquatic Park to Pier 70. The convergence of the City and the Bay provides a distinct edge to the City of San Francisco. This waterfront edge already provides many areas where the public can enjoy views of spectacular natural and built features and maritime uses that contribute to the fascination of the waterfront. In addition, the public can enjoy continuous waterfront access as they stroll along the Embarcadero Promenade or drive along the roadway. In many places, the edge can be enhanced with more access extending onto piers and wharfs and better continuity of access, views, and circulation along the waterfront edge.

Recognize the unique identity of the waterfront’s districts. From Aquatic Park to Pier 70, the waterfront passes through seven different City districts: Fisherman’s Wharf, Base of Telegraph Hill, Downtown, Rincon Hill, South Beach, Mission Bay, and Pier 70. Each of these districts has a distinct architectural character that has been created by the land uses, scale of buildings, and architectural features of the district. The historic and current uses of the waterfront also have affected the character of different areas. For example, Fisherman’s Wharf is characterized by many simply-detailed, one story industrial buildings, the Northeast Waterfront by its bulkheads and piers that were developed for cargo operations, and the Ferry Building area by its civic character. As improvements are made along the waterfront, the character of new buildings and public improvements should help strengthen the unique architectural character and identity of each of the subareas identified in this Design & Access Element. Attention to subarea identity will also strengthen the relationship between each subarea of the waterfront and its adjacent City district.
City Connection Areas

The Waterfront Design & Access goals will have the greatest opportunity to be fully realized in the “City Connection Areas”--important places where the City and the waterfront converge and where reunification of the City and the waterfront is most likely to occur. Each of these areas possesses one or more of the following features:

- **Open Space**: A significant existing or future public waterfront open space;
- **Unique Character**: An architectural or maritime character of improvements that is unique to that area of the waterfront and adjacent neighborhood;
- **Major City Street**: Each area is at the terminus of a major City street or a street that is important to the adjacent inland neighborhoods. These streets always have a view of the Bay, a historic building, or other significant architecture that identifies the waterfront edge; and
- **Uses That Attract People**: Each area contains or has the potential for maritime, cultural, commercial, civic, and other uses that activate and promote public recreation and enjoyment of the waterfront.

The City Connection Areas are located at regular, five to ten minute walking intervals along the waterfront. Together, they establish a comprehensive network of individual places from Aquatic Park to Pier 70 where public access and open space, view and historic preservation objectives will be applied to new developments. Some of the areas are already well established such as Fisherman’s Wharf. Others are identified in the Waterfront Plan as “Mixed Use Opportunity Areas” where the development of new open spaces and/or public access, maritime activities, and commercial uses is targeted. Port properties south of Pier 70 are largely developed or reserved for container terminals which preclude their redevelopment as City Connection Areas.
Aquatic Park/Hyde Street
This area includes those portions of the swimming and rowing club docks and Bay waters which are within Port jurisdiction on the east side of Aquatic Park, the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park at the Hyde Street Pier, and the new Hyde Street fishing harbor. Along with the Fisherman’s Wharf Historic Walking Tour completed in 2001, these facilities will continue to enhance the maritime, historic and recreational character of Fisherman’s Wharf.

Fisherman’s Wharf
The Wharf exhibits a unique mix of fishing and visitor-oriented uses, and an eclectic built form. Expanded fishing industry operations, harbor facilities, ferry operations, and public open space on Seawall Lots 300 and 301 will complement existing visitor attractions and draw City residents to the area.

Bay Street Pier
This area will provide an important connection to the City where Bay Street meets the historic bulkhead buildings along The Embarcadero. Piers 31-35 and Seawall Lot 314 form a development opportunity area which, together with East Wharf Park, will provide a gateway to Fisherman’s Wharf from the Northeast Waterfront.

Northeast Wharf
A new waterfront open space will be located at Pier 27, and include removal of a portion of the pier shed. It will provide a connection to the waterfront and views of Treasure Island for residents, workers and visitors to the base of Telegraph Hill area.

Broadway Pier
Pier 9 is a prime maritime site and Seawall Lots 322-I, 323 and 324 are prime sites for infill development. New uses should take advantage of the major public access amenities at Pier 7 and provide a focal point for the area where Broadway meets The Embarcadero.

Ferry Building
The Ferry Building is the focal point of the area. This historic landmark building and its environs will be restored as a regional transportation hub with public and commercial uses, a grand boulevard and new public plaza. Views from Herb Caen Way to the Bay will be enhanced.

Rincon Park & Piers
Rincon Park will provide a new downtown open space with spectacular Bay views. The Park will be enhanced by the removal of dilapidated Pier 24 and development of new maritime and commercial recreation uses on Piers 26 and 28. Pier development will include new public access with views of the Bay Bridge and the City skyline.

South Beach & Pier 46B
The South Beach area, which includes the new Giants ballpark, has undergone a transition from industrial uses to mixed residential and commercial uses. Piers 34 and 36 will be removed to create “Brannan Street Wharf,” a major public open space to serve local residents and businesses, and ballpark visitors. This open space will also serve future maritime and commercial recreation uses on adjacent Piers 30-32.

Mission Bay Waterfront
This area’s unique character is derived from an active mix of maritime uses along the shoreline ranging from cargo operations to recreational boating. Waterfront public access improvements will include new waterfront walkways along Terry Francois Boulevard and China Basin Channel with maritime and City views.

Pier 70
Located adjacent to the Port’s ship repair yard in the heart of the industrial waterfront, this area includes historic Union Iron Works buildings (Buildings 101, 102, 104 and 113-114) which should be preserved and adaptively reused.