Waterfront Views

Existing Views
The waterfront offers a stunning array of views thanks to the natural beauty of the Bay, the City’s hilly topography and downtown highrises, the compactness of adjacent districts and neighborhoods, and the historic maritime character of the waterfront. These views are a major component of the urban setting of the Port’s waterfront. The waterfront is also a strong part of San Francisco’s identity because it can be viewed in so many contexts and from so many vantage points: from near or far, from hills or at the water’s edge, from City streets or from the water.

The public views now enjoyed along the waterfront are summarized as follows:

- Major views of the Bay, the bridges, and across water
- Views of maritime activities
- Street views
- Views back to the City
- Hilltop or elevated views of the waterfront

The design policies which will be applied to new development and open space projects along the waterfront address ways to preserve and enhance existing views and to create a variety of new views. These views provide “visual access” to the waterfront and will help reunite the City with the waterfront.
View Policies
The location of new development, public access and open spaces, and other improvements to Port property will be evaluated against the following three view policies as changes to the waterfront occur. These policies were developed in coordination with, and will continue to be balanced with application of, the public access and open space and historic resource policies of this Design & Access Element.

View Sites
Establish new views at specific points or areas that afford exceptional views of the Bay and waterfront.

Street Views
Streets connecting to the waterfront should have views of the Bay, historic structures, or architecture that provides a waterfront identity.

View Intervals
Provide views of the Bay and maritime activities at frequent intervals along the Embarcadero Promenade.

Tugboats in the Northeast Waterfront
Summary of Existing Views
The following analysis of existing views is organized by view type and by vantage points from where the views can be publicly enjoyed.

Major Views of the Bay & Across Water
Views of the Bay, bridges and destinations or other points of interest across the Bay from piers or the waterfront edge.

Street Views
Street Corridor View of Water
Street Corridor View of Architecture with Waterfront Identity

Hilltop Views of the Waterfront
Panoramic views of the Bay, the City, and the waterfront from City hilltops and other elevated places.

Views Back to the City
Views of the City form or skyline from piers or the waterfront.

Views of Maritime Activities
Views of harbors or maritime activities from piers or the waterfront edge. Views of maritime activities occur at almost every pier and waterfront edge.
View Sites

Establish new views at specific points or areas that afford exceptional views of the Bay, waterfront and City.

View sites are defined as specific points or areas along the waterfront that afford exceptional views of the Bay, the City, or points across the water. Many of these views exist today and, as Port property is redeveloped, additional view opportunities will be available. Three types of existing and future views are defined and summarized on the map below -- views of the Bay and across water, views to the City, and views of maritime activities. These views will be preserved or created. When evaluating the placement of new buildings, open space, or public access areas, how best to incorporate each of the view types will be considered in the specific project design. In addition, new or enhanced views of the Bay will be achieved through the removal of dilapidated piers to create new expanses of open water. Chapter 4 includes more detailed site-specific design criteria for existing and future view sites which should be developed as new projects occur.
Street Views

*Streets that connect to the waterfront should have views of the Bay, historic structures, or architecture that provides a waterfront identity.* Streets make up approximately 30 percent of the land area in San Francisco and provide most public views of the Bay or waterfront from within the City. Currently, streets leading to the waterfront have desirable views of the Bay or buildings located along the waterfront edge, or both, depending on how streets rise up into the hills of adjacent neighborhoods. Three types of street views indicated in the map below will be preserved or created: unobstructed views of the Bay; views of an existing historic structure; or views of new buildings that provide a waterfront identity. (See Appendix A for a narrative listing of the specific streets and types of waterfront views to be provided). This policy may affect the location of new development, will require coordination with historic resource policies of this Element, and will cause the design of new buildings to reflect the uniqueness of the waterfront.
Chapter 3

Harrison Street

Green Street

Nineteenth Street
View Intervals

Provide additional Bay and maritime views from the Embarcadero Promenade. The waterfront north of China Basin is characterized by a rhythm of bulkhead buildings and openings between and within them which frame waterfront views. These view and access openings range greatly in size, from 20 foot wide openings, such as those in several areas between Piers 1 and 5, to expansive waterfront stretches which afford wide-angle Bay views, such as the 1800 foot long Embarcadero Promenade south of the Agriculture Building. The contrasts between waterfront buildings and view openings between and within them highlight and enhance the variety of view experiences that make the San Francisco waterfront unique.
To continue this pattern, development along The Embarcadero from Pier 40 at China Basin to Pier 35 in the Northeast Waterfront will include creation of new views between buildings and/or physical access to:

- The Bay;
- Water-dependent maritime activities (such as vessel berthing, tug and tow operations located in or adjacent to the water); and/or
- Public access, open space or other public attractions that invite the public onto pier areas and provide access to the Bay.

The creation of new views, combined with existing views and existing and future public access and open spaces, will create opportunities for the public to enjoy the Bay at frequent intervals. In addition, the Bayside History Walk will offer views of the inner structure of historic bulkhead and connector buildings and of the Bay. As a general rule, these views or access areas should occur every 200-500 feet (roughly the width of a single or pair of bulkheads) and extend for approximately 40 feet or more along the Embarcadero Promenade, except where openings are to be made in historic structures. Where the distance between openings approaches the longer end of this range, the width of the opening should also increase. The width of the view openings may be narrower, or their locations adjusted, to avoid adverse effects on historic resources, including the Ferry Building, Pier 1-5 bulkhead buildings, and connector buildings adjacent to bulkhead buildings at Piers 29 and 33. In addition, longer distances between view openings would be appropriate if there is a waterfront plaza or park adjacent to the pier(s) proposed for new development. The precise locations and dimensions of the view areas will be determined during the review of new development projects to ensure that they are located where they will be activated by uses in new developments, and will not conflict with maritime operations.

Existing and Illustrative View Interval Points

Proposed View Interval Points
Existing Buildings
Potential Buildings

Pier 15 - 29 Special Study Area – Open Spaces and view intervals will be reviewed further.