



PLANNING FOR OPEN SPACE

Establishing new neighborhoods or increased residential populations in existing neighborhoods prompts a need for corresponding increases in the elements that make up livable neighborhoods: schools, parks, affordable housing, transit improvements, and other features. As these neighborhoods are established through the development of new housing, services and amenities that make these neighborhoods livable must be simultaneously provided.

Quality open space is important in all city neighborhoods; but especially in the city's Eastern Neighborhoods and the areas around the downtown core. These areas have been historically underserved by open space and portions of them are now planned to transition into dense residential neighborhoods.



HOW MUCH OPEN SPACE IS APPROPRIATE?

Currently, the existing citywide open space ratio is 5.5 acres of open space/1000 residents. Mission Bay is being developed with an open space system and a ratio of 4.6/1000. But many neighborhoods are well under this level, and current and future residents are not within walking distance of useable open spaces. Underserved areas include significant portions of SoMa, Rincon Hill, Showplace Square, the Mission, Central Waterfront, and Bayview.

In these areas, in order to maintain a 5.5/1000 ratio with a forecast growth of 4,000 to 12,000 new units in the Eastern Neighborhoods, there needs to be 52 to 155 new open space acres. The number would be 43 to 130 acres, if developed at the same ratio as Mission Bay. In these land-scarce, infill neighborhoods, it may be difficult to provide adequate open space in traditional parks. Instead, a whole system of networked open spaces must be considered as well.

WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF A NEIGHBORHOOD OPEN SPACE SYSTEM?

It is important to consider not only the amount of open space, but also the quality of these open spaces, so that they are well-used and cared for by the community. This means creating open spaces that have features to attract a diverse set of users, including children, youth, and the elderly. Open spaces should include areas for active recreation, playgrounds, and a variety of seating arrangements; and they should be designed to be safe. Programmatic services are also important to create a park used by diverse constituencies. New housing, especially family housing, will bring demand for recreational programs, and there should be means to provide these services along with the space itself. For infill residential neighborhoods currently lacking in open space, new open space types could include:

Neighborhood Parks. In land scarce, infill neighborhoods, there will be few opportunities to create new neighborhood parks, ranging from 1 to 10 acres. Where these opportunities arise, these parks can create the backbone of a district's open space system, linked by linear open space systems. New neighborhood parks are currently proposed or planned in Transbay, Rincon Hill, and in central SoMa.

Sidewalk open spaces/Enhanced streetscapes. The General Plan states "streets and alleys should be considered... for providing useful recreation space which, with the installation of sitting areas and planting, can significantly improve a neighborhood at little cost to the City." In locations with excess traffic capacity, sidewalks can be significantly widened to allow for pedestrian circulation, landscaping and useable open space. The sidewalk area can hold a variety of activities, including seating areas, gardens, street trees and landscaping, active recreational features, or small play areas for children. These streets can act as linear linkages between larger open spaces.





Shared streets. Shared streets use landscaping, street furniture, and special paving treatments to encourage drivers to proceed with caution in what is essentially pedestrian space. Lightly trafficked alleys and dead end streets may be appropriate to convert to shared streets.

Pocket parks. Opportunities to convert one lot or a few small lots into a pocket open space can provide a sunny respite from the busy life of the street, a community garden, or an active playground for neighborhood families to use.

On-site open spaces. On-site open spaces such as courtyards, plazas or roof gardens can provide useful public amenities if they are publicly available and designed in a friendly and visually accessible manner. The Downtown Plan requires this type of open space for commercial development, which has resulted in a number of attractive, useable public spaces.

HOW CAN WE ACHIEVE A DESIRABLE OPEN SPACE SYSTEM?

Rules that enable new development in new neighborhoods could require the provision of open space. The following ideas describe the potential range of ways that this could occur:

- 1) All development could be subject to an open space fee. This fee could be pooled from various developments to enable the Recreation and Park Department to purchase land for open space. It would be similar in nature to the Downtown Plan's park fee, where developments pay \$2.00/sf, in addition to providing on-site open space. This proposal relies on creating a plan that identifies an open space network and options for which parcels could be converted to parks.
- 2) Developments over a certain size could be required to provide publicly-accessible open space on-site, or within a certain radius. As with the open space guidelines in the Downtown Plan, there would be guidelines to direct the design of open spaces in new residential neighborhoods to ensure that the spaces are publicly-accessible and well-used. These guidelines would cover access, sun and shading, seating areas, landscaping and other amenities.
- 3) Streets that act as recreational open spaces are highly important in high-density, land-scarce districts such as Rincon Hill and other parts of SoMa. Development could be required to make improvements that make streets into useable open space by widening sidewalks, planting trees and other landscaping, and adding amenities. Alternatively, developments could be required to pay into a fund that would make improvements based on a district-wide streetscape and open space plan.
- 4) Allowable development height and sun access to parks could conflict in a few locations, including Franklin Square and Bessie Carmichael Park. Building mass should be sculpted to protect sun access to existing parks. There are already guidelines that require this, known as Proposition K.
- 5) Buildings could be required to setback to increase sidewalk width and allow a greater range of activities to take place there. In areas of Rincon Hill and Transbay, setbacks might be required to enable sidewalks to contain useable public open space. In Showplace Square, many streets do not have sidewalks, and sidewalk width may be limited by train tracks. In these cases, developments might be required to provide a building setback to assure a minimum useable sidewalk.

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