



# PRIORITY INITIATIVES

## MISSION AND PURPOSE

The Union Square Alliance serves members and creates a high-quality, complete neighborhood experience by managing and activating public spaces; supporting existing businesses and attracting new investment; and convening, partnering, and advocating for the District's future success.

## UNION SQUARE'S IMPACT

In almost every city, Downtown districts, particularly retail cores, are a major driver for the economic health of their regions, producing revenues that can be invested throughout the community. The Union Square District fits this role as a **major economic engine for San Francisco and the Bay Area**, as made evident by the dramatic drop in sales tax revenue to the city when the Union Square District businesses were required to close down due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

While Union Square regains its footing, it is important to note that the District continues to need investment to remain a successful revenue and job producer for the city and region. Going forward, specific actions and strategies are needed for Union Square to remain the shopping, hospitality, cultural, entertainment, and social heart of the Bay Area.

## DOWNTOWN BY THE NUMBERS

Despite being less than 0.6 percent of San Francisco's landmass, the Union Square District accounts for a **significant amount of San Francisco's economic activity**. In 2017, this included 14 percent of citywide retail sales (and a wider range of offerings than similar Downtown Districts) and 13 percent of citywide sales tax revenue. The District also contained 10 percent of office space and 11 percent of employment citywide. Additionally, the 27-block District is a valuable citywide asset, with an assessed rate of \$21 billion accounting for three percent of the City's total assessed value.\*

\*The Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities, A publication created by the International Downtown Association (2017)

## Moving Forward . . .

In the spring of 2022, as the pandemic stay-at-home orders were being lifted, the Union Square Alliance began an effort to engage local stakeholders, residents, and elected leaders in a discussion about the future of the Union Square District. All parties share a common goal to see the District re-open and have every shop, hotel, restaurant, bar, theater, performance hall, residence, and destination in the District thrive and prosper.

While the impacts of the pandemic have been substantial for San Francisco and Union Square, the energy created and nurtured over the past decade in the District has laid a solid foundation for recovery. The Union Square Alliance's Strategic Plan lays the groundwork for a thoughtful and coordinated effort to help Union Square move forward!

UNION  
SQUARE

# THE VISION FOR UNION SQUARE

Union Square is ready to bounce forward from the pandemic as a stronger, more resilient, and more unified District. The Union Square Alliance has developed a bold and aspirational vision to guide Downtown San Francisco's future trajectory, momentum, and ambitions. The **Vision Elements** below — coupled with several Goals, Priority Initiatives, and Actions — create a framework that will guide the Union Square Alliance and its partners for the next three years and beyond.



## WELCOMING

Union Square is a vibrant, walkable, and inclusive destination that attracts, embraces, and supports a diverse range of people including San Francisco community members, shoppers, workers, and residents as well as regional, national, and international visitors.



## AUTHENTIC

Loved by both locals and tourists, Union Square is an original San Francisco district, deeply rooted in the city's people, history, geography, and architecture while constantly evolving and innovating to meet the needs of the 21st century.



## EXCITING

With its iconic public park and plaza, active programming and events, and dynamic streetscape environment, the Union Square District is a creative, lively place to gather with friends and family; discover bold and innovative art, music, and fashion; explore hidden gems; and have one-of-a-kind experiences.



## COMPLETE

Union Square is a unique, multifaceted neighborhood with a wide range of offerings, from exceptional retail shops, bustling restaurants and bars, luxury hotels, and modern workplaces, to extraordinary art galleries, premier theaters and cultural institutions, urban residences, and great public spaces.



## THRIVING

Union Square is a critical economic engine for San Francisco and the Bay Area, with high-profile retail stores, boutique shops, established businesses and offices, entrepreneurial start-ups, and busy hotels and entertainment venues all contributing to City revenues and a vital, healthy economy.

# CONDITIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The following is a snapshot of the **market trends, physical space environment, and policy conditions** impacting the Union Square District in 2022. In addition to the four conditions and opportunities topic areas shown here, Chapter One includes an expanded description of challenges and approaches.

## MARKET AND COMPETITIVE POSITION

Even before the pandemic, there were signs that the Union Square District and Downtown shopping districts nationwide were losing market position with consumers. Creating more flexibility to foster a range of uses will be critical to cultivating a more complete, resilient, innovative, and vibrant District.

### Takeaways:

- The Union Square District is Part of the Overbuilt United States Retail Industry
- A Balanced Mix of Uses is Best Positioned to Weather Economic Storms
- Luxury Retail Tends to be Recession-Proof, While Mass Market Retail is Vulnerable
- Grabbing the Attention of the Consumer Has Become More Challenging
- Retailers Have Become More Selective
- Regaining Rank in the Eyes of National Retailers is Critical
- Culture is a Differentiator for Cities
- Urban Residential Drives Evening and Weekend Activity
- Hospitality is Shifting Towards Smaller and Unique Hotel Stay Experiences
- Urban Grit Makes the Union Square District Special but Can Also Act as a Barrier to Success

## PUBLIC SPACE AND ACTIVATION

The Union Square District's unique public spaces (including its famed namesake plaza, streets, and alleyways); diversity of land uses; and access and transportation are all important assets for the District. While challenges exist, changes can be made to the physical framework and environment that offer the opportunity for reinvention and renewal.

### Takeaways:

- Union Square Park and Plaza is an Imageable Urban Room and Signature Plaza Destination
- Retailing Dominates the Urban Form and Perception of the Area
- A Lively Atmosphere that Welcomes a Cross Section of the Region
- Opportunities Abound for Public Art Experiences in the Public Realm
- Union Square is Surrounded by Several other Unique Downtown Urban Neighborhoods
- Local and Regional Accessibility is a Unique Asset
- Parking is Available but Often Lacks Wayfinding, Lighting, Cleanliness and Safety
- Streets and Storefronts Lack People, Leaving a Disjointed and Unsettling Impression



## PLANNING, POLICY AND ADVOCACY

Rethinking existing zoning and regulatory code to adapt to shifts in market forces and consumer habits is essential to restoring and maintaining a sustainable business climate. The Union Square District must meet the needs of each of three interrelated stakeholders – the area’s landlords, tenants, and consumers – in equal measure to ensure a vibrant and successful District.

### Takeaways:

- Downtown Retail is the Dominant Zoning District
- More Retail is Required by Code than the Market Can Sustain
- Collaborative Relationships are Needed for Success
- Data is Helping Identify Market Shifts

## ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The growing demand for services in today’s urban environment requires specific areas of expertise and organizational responses. Alignment and cooperation around key challenges with a range of partners will be critical to ensuring the economic strength, safety, and vitality of the Union Square District.

### Takeaways:

- Growth and Change Under Extraordinary Circumstances
- Strong Core Programs and New Expertise Central to Recovery
- Solidifying Key Positions to Ensure Effectiveness



## ACHIEVING OUR GOALS

By focusing on five tangible **Goals**, the Union Square Alliance can help focus resources to ensure important strides are made in realizing the Vision Elements and charting a future of continued growth and success.

In addition to the **Priority Actions** shown here, Chapter 3 includes a full list of actions that will be undertaken as funding, resources, and time allow.

### \*Action currently on-going by the Alliance



## GOAL A: PROMOTE A SAFE AND WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

Ensure a safe, inviting, and clean Union Square through the provision of exceptional services, amenities, and experiences.

### PRIORITY INITIATIVE: PROVIDE EXCEPTIONAL SERVICES, AMENITIES, AND EXPERIENCES, ESPECIALLY AT ARRIVAL POINTS

#### Top Actions:

- Improve overall quality and visibility of service delivery for members including security, cleaning, trash collection, and pressure washing\*
- Advocate with the City and public garage management companies for permanent programs to clean and secure City parking garages\*
- Continue police presence with an emphasis on community policing strategies such as the ambassador program, 10 B officers, Legion Security, and police department\*
- Engage with BART/MUNI and the City around cleanliness and security in the BART/MUNI stations to enhance these important arrival points
- Convene a Union Square community based Homelessness Task Force to develop partnerships for effective programs for the those in need
- Institute curb-side valet parking for visitors in the central part of the District

## GOAL B: BUILD A STRONG ECONOMY

Develop a robust and diverse mix of uses, programs, services, and activities to foster an economically vibrant and sustainable Union Square.

**PRIORITY INITIATIVE: ENSURE ALL FLOORS OF UNION SQUARE'S BUILDINGS ARE OCCUPIED WITH VIBRANT ACTIVITIES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE VITALITY OF DOWNTOWN SAN FRANCISCO**

### Top Actions:

- Work with the City to update Union Square District's zoning controls for floors 2 and 3 (to eliminate current emphasis and requirements on retail uses on the first three floors to instead focus requirements for retail and related uses on the ground floor)
- Advocate with Planning to update Union Square's zoning to permit, encourage, and remove obstacles to residential and office uses on all floors above the ground level
- Work with the City and building owners to update the Union Square District zoning controls so that required active commercial uses on ground floors are defined broadly enough to reflect reduced demand for classic retail uses
- Pursue economic incentives and programs that fill spaces with desirable tenancies and allow properties to adapt to establish a District that is diverse in its retail offerings
- **Pursue new tenants by developing a coordinated Tenant Recruitment Consortium, including the Alliance, Office of Economic Workforce Development (OEWD), commercial brokers, and building owners; focus initial efforts on the Powell Street corridor in coordination with public realm initiatives\***

## GOAL C: CULTIVATE AN AUTHENTIC VIBE

Celebrate the genuine urbanity, exciting culture, and layered texture of the Union Square District, the true heart and soul of San Francisco.

**PRIORITY INITIATIVE: CREATE AUTHENTIC “ONLY IN SAN FRANCISCO” ADVERTISING AND MARKETING TOOLS TO HIGHLIGHT THE UNIQUE NATURE OF UNION SQUARE AS COMPARED TO OTHER SHOPPING DISTRICTS AROUND THE REGION**

### Top Actions:

- Tailor marketing and advertising campaigns to highlight the uniquely urban nature of Union Square such as cable cars, street activity, beautiful buildings, and a variety of close-by attractions
- Work with Downtown stakeholders and the City to encourage and participate in coordinated press and public relations campaigns around the revival of Downtown San Francisco
- **Partner with major institutions and arts groups to celebrate civic and fine art throughout the District such as public art, light installations, and indoor galleries\***
- **Increase participatory and cultural programming in the Plaza and throughout the District, such as dance, skating, art, and music\***

## GOAL D: ELEVATE THE ICONIC PLAZA AND EMBRACE INTIMATE SPACES

Bolster Union Square Park and plaza and Powell Street/Hallidie Plaza as programmed public open spaces that are active, flexible, sustainable, creative, surprising, fun, and inclusive. Create special, human-scaled experiences throughout Union Square's streetscape and public realm – in places such as alleys, corners, and small plazas – to provide a sense of comfort, beauty, and discovery.

**PRIORITY INITIATIVE: ACTIVATE AND UPGRADE THE PUBLIC REALM WITH A FOCUS ON UNION SQUARE PLAZA, POWELL STREET/HALLIDIE PLAZA, AND ALLEYS**

### Top Actions:

- Work with the City's Recreation and Parks Department to explore a partnership so the Alliance can enhance music, events, and art programming in the Plaza
- **Advocate with the City's Recreation and Parks Department to increase the range of everyday activities and pop-ups in Union Square Park and Plaza, with a focus on food vending and temporary activation\***
- Develop short, medium, and long-range plans that coordinate with filling vacancies, to transform Powell Street into a unique cable car-centered promenade between Market and Post streets
- Create intimate "urban rooms" in Maiden Lane, Campton Place and one other alley, using seating, lighting, flowers and other unique elements

## GOAL E: ENSURE A HEALTHY AND ENDURING ORGANIZATION

Promote organizational health and sustainability through hiring exceptional staff; outlining and adhering to a clear vision and set of goals; leveraging the Union Square Alliance Board and membership; and building critical partnerships with stakeholders and City leaders to achieve alignment and execute on desired outcomes.

**PRIORITY INITIATIVE: STRENGTHEN COMMUNICATIONS AND HIRE FOR KEY POSITIONS TO ADVANCE THE ORGANIZATION AND STRATEGIC PLAN**

### Top Actions:

- Advocate with the City for clear and direct lines of communication, including a designee by the Office of the Mayor as a primary contact and attendance at regular monthly/ bi-monthly meetings
- **Hire a full-time Chief Operating Officer (COO), a "chief of staff" to support the Executive Director and manage the operational aspects of the organization's programs, including overseeing the introduction of a strong economic development capacity within the Alliance, and supporting the Executive Director to achieve the organization's policy goals\***
- **Hire an Executive Assistant for the Executive Director (CEO) to help support and enable advocacy work\***
- Create a part-time Chief Financial Officer (CFO) position to maintain financial expertise and retain institutional knowledge
- Explore hiring additional positions and/or consultants to address needs, such as an Economic Development Specialist



