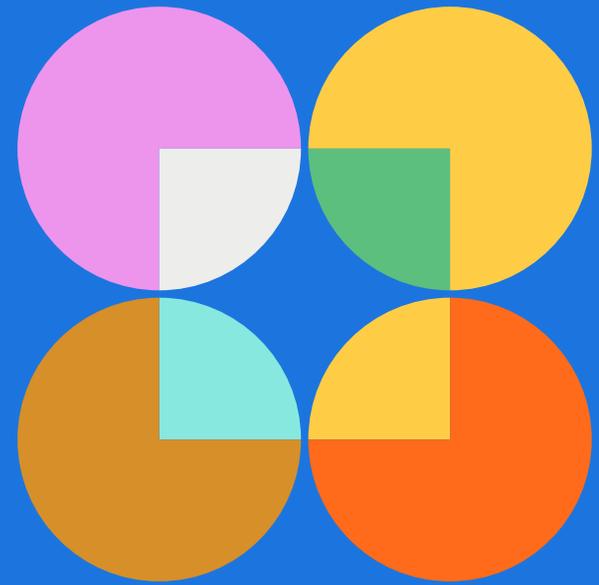




# UNION SQUARE ALLIANCE



## Strategic Plan

MARCH 2023

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# Strategic Plan

**MARCH 2023**

# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

On behalf of the Union Square Alliance, our Board of Directors, and the entire Union Square community, I am thrilled to present the Alliance's 2022 Strategic Plan!

The Union Square Alliance has already rolled up its sleeves, working closely with our City of San Francisco partners and City leaders advocating for the rebirth of Downtown. Beginning early this year, the Alliance embarked on the creation of a new Strategic Plan and brought on nationally recognized planning and strategy consultants MIG and Streetsense to work with us.

This Plan will help the Alliance shape a new direction for the Union Square District. However, this is not just a Plan for the Alliance alone, it is also intended to be a critical forward-looking document to help us understand how the Union Square District must evolve in order to continue to be an engine for the entire City.

As you will read, the Plan highlights these key goals:

- A.** Promote a Safe and Welcoming Environment
- B.** Build a Strong Economy
- C.** Cultivate an Authentic Vibe
- D.** Elevate the Iconic Plaza and Embrace Intimate Spaces
- E.** Ensure a Healthy and Enduring Organization

With these goals, and their accompanying focused implementing actions, we will speed and guide Union Square's recovery as a thriving, multi-faceted center-city neighborhood equipped for the 21st Century.

I want to thank Mayor London Breed, Supervisor Aaron Peskin, and Police Chief Bill Scott for their unwavering support and encouragement for this Plan and all of the Alliance's work. In addition to these City leaders, we would not be experiencing our current strong recovery without our police officers, both on duty and those who are retired but still giving of their time, and our amazing Union Square Alliance Ambassadors in blue on the front lines, day in and day out. Last but not least, the dedication and commitment of our incredible Union Square Alliance staff make this work possible.

As we continue to put the pandemic behind us, we at the Alliance could not be more optimistic about Union Square's future and proud of the leadership role we are playing and will continue to play in shaping the future of the heart of San Francisco. We invite you to join us on this important journey.

- Marisa Rodriguez, Executive Director

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# 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!



# 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 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:

- Manage Growth and Change Under Extraordinary Circumstances
- Strong Core Programs and New Expertise Central are Central to Recovery
- Solidify 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 ongoing 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 by completing RFP for Clean & Safe services by June 2023 and Security by Dec 2023\*
- Advocate with SFMTA and public garage management companies for permanent programs to clean and secure City parking garages, such as regular cleaning (pressure-washing) schedule, security services 24/7, and locked gates at night\*
- Continue security and police presence by maintaining Mobile Command unit in Union Square indefinitely, with emphasis on community-policing strategies, such as the ambassador program, 10 B officers, security firm, and the Police Department (PD)\*
- Convene a Union Square community-based Homelessness Task Force to develop partnerships for effective programs for those in need and launch program
- Institute curb-side valet parking for visitors in the central part of the District in order to promote a safe and welcoming arrival experience

## 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:

- Update Union Square District's zoning controls for floors 2 and 3 to eliminate current emphasis on and requirements for retail uses on the first three floors, and instead, focus requirements for retail and related uses on the ground floor
- Update Union Square District's zoning to permit, encourage, and remove obstacles to residential and office uses on all floors above the ground level
- Work with the City to explore and implement economic incentives and programs that fill spaces with desirable tenancies allowing properties to adapt so as to establish a District that is diverse in its retail offerings
- **Pursue new tenants by developing a coordinated Tenant Recruitment Consortium (broker committee), including the Alliance, Office of Workforce Economic Development (OEWD), commercial brokers, and building owners; focus initial efforts on 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:

- Create and execute a campaign strategy for marketing and advertising campaigns that 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
- **Work 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\***
- Develop short-, medium-, and long-range design plans that coordinate filling vacancies and replacing aged promenade to transform Powell Street into a unique cable car-centered promenade between Market and Geary or Post streets
- Create an intimate “urban room” in Maiden Lane, using seating, lighting, flowers, and other unique elements

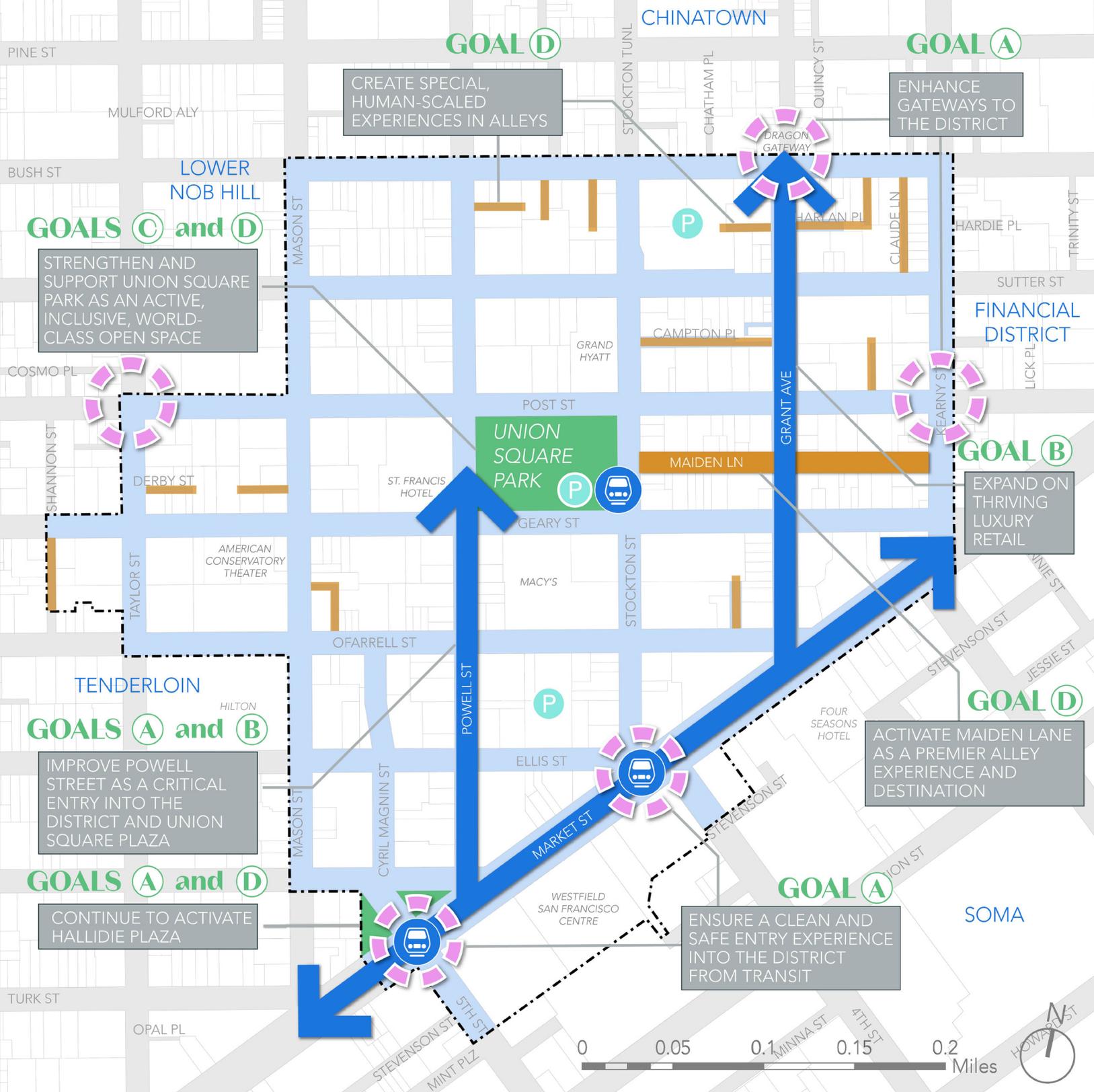
## GOAL E: ENSURE A HEALTHY AND ENDURING ORGANIZATION

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:

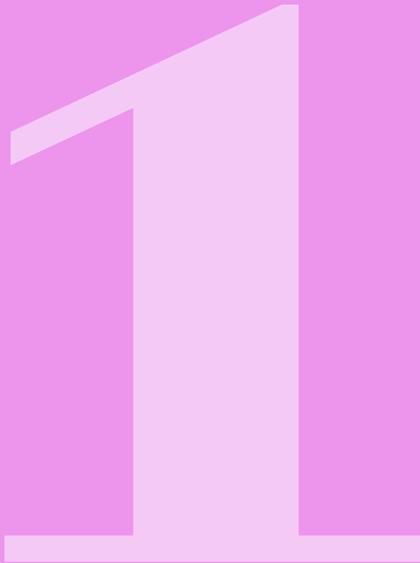
- Advocate with the City for clear and direct lines of communication, including a designee from the Office of the Mayor as a primary contact that attends regular monthly/bi-monthly meetings
- **Hire a full-time Chief Operating Officer (COO), a “chief of staff”, to support the Executive Director and manage 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 various programmatic needs as funding allows



# PHYSICAL STRATEGY DIAGRAM

The **Physical Strategy Diagram** highlights the priority areas where the Alliance will undertake the strategies and actions from the Strategic Plan. The physical environment — where people shop, work, live, and visit every day — must feel safe, comfortable, active, and welcoming at all times. Key activations and improvements will help Union Square continue to thrive as a world-class urban District.

\*Boundary includes streets adjacent to District for visual purposes only



SECRETARY OF THE NAVY  
JOHN D. LONG  
TO  
COMMODORE  
GEORGE DEWEY  
APRIL 24 1898

WAR HAS COMMENCED  
BETWEEN THE UNITED  
STATES AND SPAIN.  
PROCEED AT ONCE  
TO THE PHILIPPINE  
ISLANDS AND CAP-  
TURE OR DESTROY  
THE SPANISH FLEET.

AMERICAN SQUADRON  
MANILA BAY  
OLYMPIA  
LACONIA  
BALTIMORE  
RALEIGH  
BOSTON  
CONCORD  
PETREL  
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ON MAY FOURTEENTH  
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THEODORE ROOSEVELT

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## Setting the Stage: A New Era of Opportunity for Union Square

Cities have always had to evolve with and adapt to changing times – and the past few years have brought about profound transformation for urban centers across the world.

**Union Square is the heart of San Francisco**, serving as the City's historic center for retail, tourism, hospitality, entertainment, and culture. Today the District is showing signs of recovery from the acute shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic including, the loss of commuting workers; the effects of growing awareness around racial and social inequities; the impacts of the homelessness and drug crisis; and the loss of market position (experienced not only by Union Square but by shopping districts throughout the country). While there is uncertainty about the timing of the recovery and the extent of the restructuring of the retail industry, the Union Square District remains an enduring tourist destination and a center for Downtown retailing. Luxury retailing continues to show strength and the District is already seeing an uptick in activity around tourism and hotel stays. With this foundation, Union Square must also evolve from 20th century retailing center to a complete 21st century retail and mixed-use neighborhood to ensure resilience in the face of ongoing change.

The value of the Union Square District is immense to both Downtown San Francisco and the region. While the impacts of the pandemic have been substantial, the energy created and nurtured over the past decades has laid a solid foundation for quick recovery. **Union Square is poised for a resurgence.**





Established in 1999, The Union Square Business Improvement District (USBID), now doing business as the Union Square Alliance, was San Francisco's first BID. The BID successfully renewed for an additional five-year term starting in 2005. In 2009, the USBID renewed a second time and expanded its services to include marketing, public realm beautification, and advocacy. The most recent 10-year reauthorization on July 9, 2019, expanded the District's clean and safe services, including 24/7 response with security patrols, in the expanded boundary. The Union Square BID enhances the experiences of visitors to the area by continuing to provide the maintenance and public safety services originally offered and now expanded. In addition, the BID will maintain Union Square's standing as a premier retail, hotel and theater District and favorite visitor destination through marketing, advocacy and beautification programs. The Union Square Alliance has been an integral partner in the District's advancing growth and change. The organization will continue to positively impact strategic outcomes directly benefitting Downtown, key partners, area stakeholders, business owners, residents, visitors, workers, and the broader region. *(San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development)*

## UNION SQUARE ALLIANCE – ORGANIZATIONAL ROLES AND SCOPE

Since its founding in 1999, the Union Square Alliance's (or Alliance's) focus has been to keep the District clean, safe, attractive, and vibrant. Serving as the “voice of Union Square”, the organization represents the interests of its members while responding to emerging global trends in retailing, hospitality, performance, and the public realm that are reshaping dense urban centers and shopping districts. The Alliance and its programs, initiatives, and priorities must change with its surrounding environment so the organization can respond and adapt to the needs of its members, as well as to the expectations of Union Square property and business owners, visitors, workers, and residents. The area's economic, physical, and social contexts have changed significantly over the past several years, and the Alliance must respond with **bold ideas and strategic actions to bring about a new vision for a new era.**

## STRATEGIC PLAN PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The **Union Square Alliance Strategic Plan** (or Strategic Plan) coalesces a wealth of ideas, analysis, strategy, and focus to help position the Union Square Alliance for continued success now and into the future. It outlines a specific path forward for the next three years, charting a course for recovery and transition so the Union Square District can reinforce its position as a central element of San Francisco's Downtown environment.

During the planning process, Alliance leadership, staff, and stakeholders developed a bold new vision for the Union Square District as San Francisco's **Best Pedestrian District and Urban Experience**. This Strategic Plan clearly articulates a place that is **Welcoming, Authentic, Exciting, Complete, and Thriving** – while outlining a set of goals, strategies, actions, and best practices to realize this exciting vision.

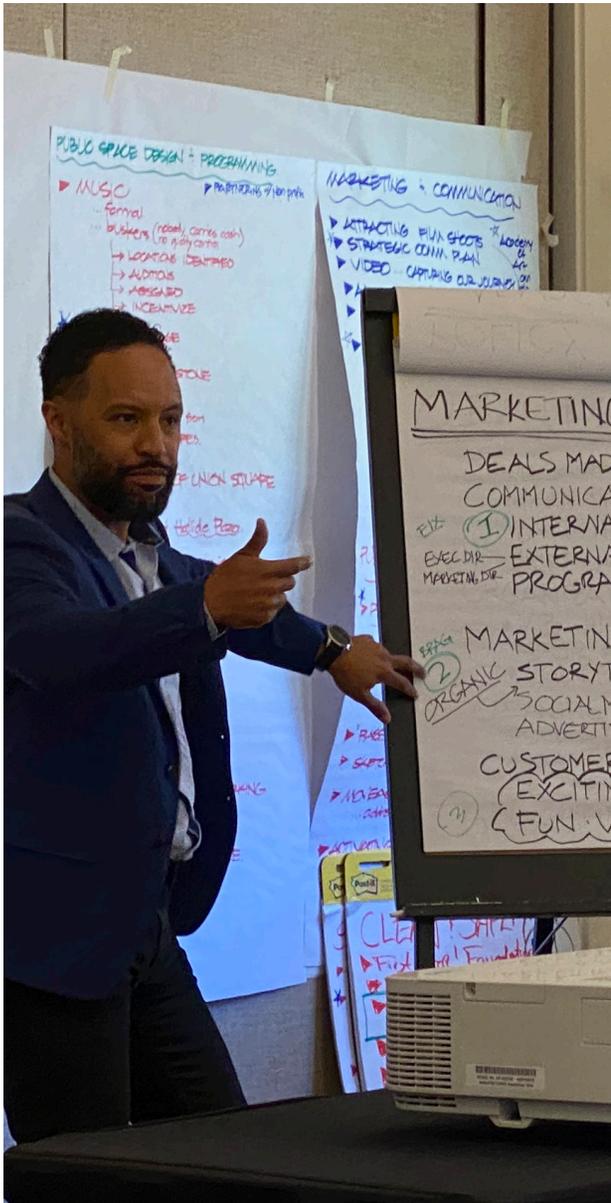
## PLANNING PROCESS

### OVERALL PROJECT

In 2022, the Alliance Board of Directors began a process to develop and conduct a strategic planning process, framework, and document. The Alliance selected MIG, Inc. (a Berkeley-based consulting firm with extensive experience working with Downtown partnerships and BIDs nationwide) and Streetsense (a Bethesda, Maryland-based global creative collective of place shapers, brand builders, and storytellers) to develop a Strategic Plan for the next three years. Initial work began in spring 2022, followed by a series of engagement activities and draft product development during the summer. The project culminated with an Alliance Board of Directors presentation and final plan in fall 2022.



The planning process included a series of stakeholder focus groups and one-on-one interviews to gather ideas on assets, constraints, and opportunities for the Union Square District.



Alliance Board members participated in a lively discussion at a one-day off-site planning workshop.

## ENGAGEMENT

The planning process included in-depth engagement with Alliance Board members, stakeholder groups and partners, the management team, and staff using multiple platforms to gather their input. Specific activities included:

**In-Person Board Interviews:** The consultant team conducted one-on-one interviews with 14 Alliance Board members to identify key assets, challenges, and opportunities facing the Union Square District and organization.

**Walking Tours:** The consultant team conducted on-site walking tours and analysis to confirm the study area boundaries; photo-document the District; observe and discuss social and economic conditions; identify opportunities for ground-floor activation, upper-story development, and re-use; safety interventions; programming; placemaking; and other improvements.

## Organizational Interviews with Alliance Staff:

The consultant team conducted individual and group interviews with staff tasked with executing the organization's various programs.

**Meetings with City Staff:** The consultant team met with San Francisco City staff members throughout the process to test emerging ideas and gather input for implementation.

**Board Retreat:** The Alliance Board, management team, and staff participated in a one-day off-site planning workshop facilitated by the consultant team. The purpose of the session was to build, shape, and refine the overall vision for the District and organization and to form the basis for the Strategic Plan framework. Activities included large-group and small-group presentations, brainstorming sessions, and interactive exercises.

**“The pandemic has slowed down use of the Park and Plaza; it needs a WOW to bring it back!”**

- *Manuela King, RHAA President*

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

Input from the engagement sessions provided several key takeaways for consideration in developing the Strategic Plan. The following is a brief overview of discussion items from the meetings and focus groups.

### Market and Competitive Position

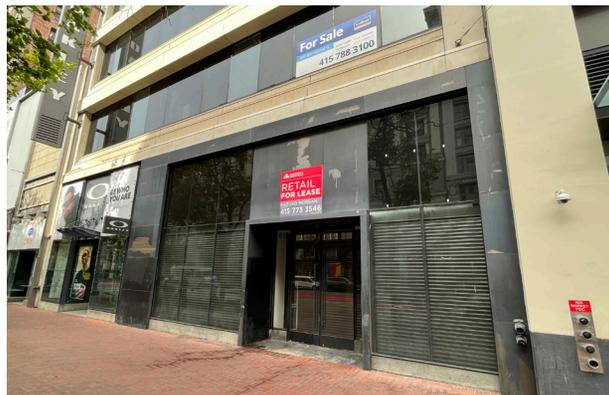
Even before the pandemic, there were signs that the Union Square District and Downtown shopping districts nationwide were losing market position with consumers. Creating more flexibility to foster a range of uses will be critical to cultivating a more complete, resilient, innovative, and vibrant District.

### Public Space Design 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.

**“Hotels have been a good influence, adding interaction and visitors that could take advantage of the seasonal markets and the new amenities. Leisure guests are staying an average of 2.5 nights which is more than business travel”**

*- Terry Lewis, Hilton Complex*



The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated trends of ground-floor vacancies in the district.



Pedestrian traffic is steadily increasing as tourists return to Union Square.



Flagship retail remains a critical element of Union Square's identity.



Alleys present opportunities for activation throughout the District.

### 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.

### 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.

**“Union Square has served for decades as one of the region’s most significant connection points and hub for economic activity. It is one of the primary entry points into the city from the greater Bay Area and beyond. Preserving its role within the new economic context brought about by the pandemic and larger market forces will be essential to maximizing San Francisco’s economic health and identity as a city.”**

*– Kat Daniel, Mayors Office of Economic Workforce Development*

**“We created Union Square’s current zoning regulations in 1985, when the chief concern was protecting space for department and multi level retail stores and limiting other uses that might compete. Now in 2022, the landscape is very different and it’s time to rethink Union Square’s important role in the City’s life, along with the zoning rules that enable it. ”**

*–Dean Macris, Planning Director under Mayors Alioto, Feinstein, Agnos and Newsom*



Existing buildings have capacity for a greater mix of uses in upper stories.



The Board of Directors convened to discuss refinements to the organization’s vision and structure moving forward.

## Conditions and Opportunities for Union Square and the Alliance

Building from the stakeholder engagement process and extensive analysis by staff and the consultant team, the following is a snapshot of the **market trends, physical space environment, and policy conditions** impacting the Union Square District in 2022. The following section summarizes the conditions present in the District and greater Downtown San Francisco as the area recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the pandemic continues to have far-reaching impacts, it is important to understand and celebrate the Union Square District's many successes over its significant history. Moving forward, the Alliance and its partners must work together to rekindle this vibrancy so that the Union Square District can remain the **cultural, economic, entertainment, political, and social heart of Downtown San Francisco** and a major attraction throughout the Bay Area.





Long considered "the heart of San Francisco," the Plaza is often a starting point for many first-time visitors.

## UNION SQUARE DISTRICT CONTEXT AND AREA

The following describes the context and area:

**Organization:** The Union Square Alliance is a 501(c)(4) property-based business improvement District. The Alliance also has an associated 501(c)(3) Union Square Foundation which holds two annual fundraising events as part of its major initiatives.

**Extent:** The Union Square Alliance represents approximately 27 blocks of Downtown San Francisco containing over 620 parcels and over 1,200 storefront and upper floor businesses. Considered "the heart of San Francisco" and a starting point for many first-time visitors, the Union Square District's attractions are contained in this dense urban core, including historic Union Square Park and Plaza, the famous cable cars, renowned restaurants, luxury hotels, and one of the largest concentrations of retail shopping on the West Coast.

**Funding Structure:** The majority of Union Square Alliance funding derives from annual property assessments, followed by contract revenue, and foundation and City grants. A 23-member Board of Directors comprised of property owners, retailers, hoteliers, and

at-large individuals is responsible for setting Alliance priorities and policies, while the Alliance management team oversees the organization's day-to-day operations.

**Programs:** The Union Square Alliance services and programs include:

### CLEAN AND SAFE

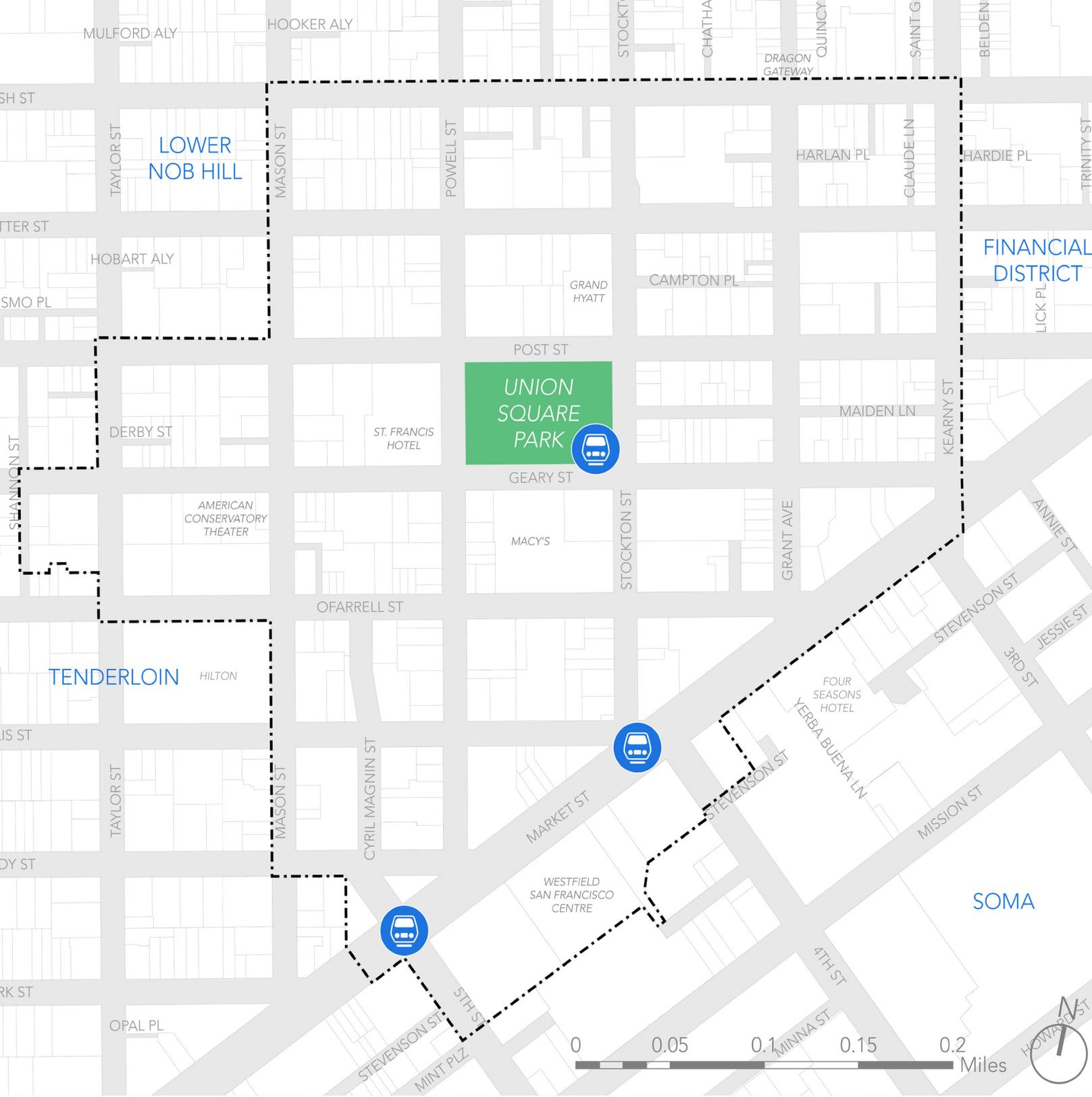
- Cleaning and Sidewalk Maintenance
- Public Safety (Ambassadors, 10 B Officer Program, Private Security, and Security Camera Project)
- Union Square Cares
- Community Relations (Hospitality Ambassador Program)
- BigBelly Program

### STREETSCAPES, PUBLIC REALM, BEAUTIFICATION, AND ACTIVATION

Activations and services from Union Square Park and Plaza, Hallidie Plaza, and alleys, including public art, landscaping and greening, and lighting

### ADVOCACY AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

### DESTINATION MARKETING, COMMUNICATIONS AND EVENTS



**STUDY AREA**

Legend

 BART/MUNI Station

 Union Square District\*

The Union Square Alliance represents approximately 27 blocks of Downtown San Francisco. It is comprised of more than 620 parcels and more than 1,200 ground-floor and upper-floor businesses.

\*Boundary includes streets adjacent to District for visual purposes only



## OVERALL TRENDS AND PANDEMIC IMPACTS

The following statistics describe the most significant indicators of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Union Square District:

**Employment:** The 2017 International Development Association (IDA's) Value of Downtown report estimated that the Union Square District added 69,592 jobs to the City of San Francisco's employment base.

**Ground Floor Vacancy:** Before the pandemic stay-at-home orders were instituted and economic activity was brought to a halt, Union Square had a 12 percent vacancy rate for ground floor retail. In 2022, the vacancy rate is approximately 35 percent, **almost 200 percent greater than its pre-pandemic rate**, which means approximately one in three storefronts are empty.

**Sales Taxes:** In 2019, the sales tax generated by the Union Square District was 11.4 million dollars. In 2020, sales tax dropped almost 52 percent to 5.5 million dollars. The District's recovery is underway, but the **sales tax remains almost 37 percent below where it once was**, totaling 7.2 million dollars in 2021.

**Union Square Events:** In 2019, an estimated 35 events were held in Union Square Park, compared with fewer than five events held in 2020. In 2022, 15 events will be held which is **still 50 percent less than the pre-pandemic number of events**.

**Convention Room Nights:** Conference delegates occupied 970,000 rooms in 2019 and by 2021 only 18,000 rooms, **a greater than 98 percent reduction at the height of the pandemic**. In 2021, there were only five conventions, while 33 conventions are projected for 2022. However, even with the increase in the number of events, attendance remains significantly reduced from previous years. In 2019, The Dreamforce Convention enjoyed 175,000 attendees, with only 37,000 attendees estimated for 2022, a **78 percent decrease in persons at the event**.

**Hotel Occupancy:** Hotel occupancy in the City was at 82 percent in February 2020, with an average daily rate of 267 dollars per room. While there has been a strong recovery since the onset of the pandemic, **overall occupancy rates remain at 66 percent in 2022 — 16 percent below February 2020 rates** — with a corresponding lower average daily room rate of 235 dollars.

**Pedestrian Counts:** On the 100 Block of Powell Street, pedestrian traffic dropped 90 percent during the pandemic from a 2019 average of 184,514 persons per week to a 2020 average of 15,849 persons per week. In 2022, the same location is still almost **72 percent below pre-pandemic levels** with a 2022 average of 51,767 persons per week.



Pedestrian traffic dropped 90 percent during the pandemic.



Even before the pandemic, retail space throughout the U.S. was in excess supply relative to demand.



Retail thrives in locations with multiple sources of foot traffic.

## MARKET AND COMPETITIVE POSITION

### The Union Square District is Part of the Overbuilt United States Retail Industry

Even before the pandemic, supply exceeded demand by 8 to 10 percent of retail space in the country (approximately one billion square feet). The pandemic accelerated these trends, despite the concentration of shopping opportunities and access by public transit. Today, compared to pre-pandemic, the District is experiencing a 44 percent decline in foot traffic, 35 percent total retail vacancy, approximately 150 vacant retail spaces (largely on Powell, Stockton, and Market streets), and a 25 percent decline in retail sales tax. Currently, retail is effectively required by code on many corridors and building floors — without commensurate demand. Flexibility relative to where retail is required — and on how many building floors — can help address the reduced demand and fill underutilized space.

### A Balanced Mix of Uses is Best Positioned to Weather Economic Storms

Retail thrives in locations where there are multiple sources of foot traffic. Mixed-asset neighborhoods maximize retail sales potential and provide stability during periods when

one asset class is thriving, and another is weak. For example, it became clear during the pandemic shutdown in spring 2020 that residential neighborhoods where restaurants were typically closed for lunch on weekdays benefitted from an abundance of daytime foot traffic stemming from the work-from-home movement. While the office sector will likely rebound in the coming years, the work-from-home shift is expected to have elements that remain permanent. Attracting more residential uses to the Union Square District would help create a more stable and sustainable mixed-use neighborhood.

### Luxury Retail Tends to be Recession-Proof, While Mass Market Retail is Vulnerable

Two distinct markets exist within the retail industry: luxury and mass market. This is especially visible in the Union Square District, where luxury retail continues to thrive and mass-market retail is experiencing a continued wave of closures. The success of luxury retail can be attributed to its relative lack of brand overexposure in most markets (compared to frequent overexpansion by mass market brands), combined with the spending power of

the luxury consumer, which is not only more robust than the mass market consumer but also more stable during periods of economic downturn. Since March 2020, the luxury market in Union Square has experienced 22 closures (compared to 26 mass market closures) and nine new openings (compared with three mass market openings). Opportunity exists for the Union Square District to build on its relatively more stable luxury retail market and create a broader shopping experience for a wide range of consumers.

### Grabbing the Attention of the Consumer Has Become More Challenging

Consumers today have many more distractions than they had 20 years ago. This applies to diversions on how to spend both money and time. Consumers of all ages have changed their priorities when it comes to the accumulation of goods and the prioritization of free time. For example, rather than regularly spending entire days at the shopping mall, the highly coveted 18-34 demographic spends hours on social media. Adults spend more time and money traveling and on childcare and personal health. This is reflected in

retail growth patterns, which since 2008 have witnessed a majority of retail growth coming from the Food & Beverage and Home Furnishings categories, with minimal growth in the Apparel sector. Going forward, in addition to retail shopping, the Union Square District must provide compelling social experiences and opportunities centered on health, food and beverage, home decor, and travel.

### Retailers Have Become More Selective

In the second half of the 20th century, decades-long overexpansion in the retail sector was fueled by investor focus on unit and revenue growth; unchecked development of regional shopping malls; and overly optimistic zoning and municipal requirements that required ground floor retail where retail should not exist. Paired with changing consumer prioritization of expendable income, the effect on retail supply and demand forces has been highly disruptive. Following the 2008 recession, retailers began to focus more on targeted expansion and profit growth, even placing significant emphasis on locations that reflect their brand ambitions (e.g., character of place, retail co-tenancy), resulting in a much slower and selective



Following the 2008 recession, retailers began to focus more on locations that reflect their brand ambitions.



The success of luxury retail can be attributed in part to its relative lack of brand overexposure in most markets.

approach to site selection. With growth in supply exceeding growth in demand, it is a “tenant’s market,” with retailers facing more choice than ever. Retailers choose the location that checks the most boxes and will even pass altogether if no available sites meet a detailed set of criteria. Understanding what retailers are looking for and matching their checklists is needed for success.

### Regaining Rank in the Eyes of National Retailers is Critical

Once viewed as an essential region for expansion, the Bay Area is no longer one of the five most prioritized regions for new-to-market site selection. Rising costs, the perception of crime and blight, and an increasing array of underwhelming performance data encourage retailers to look elsewhere. Once a retailer closes a store, it is very difficult to get them to open again in the future. Through a continuing commitment to recovery, evolution, and diversification, the Union Square District has an important role to play in the Bay Area regaining its footing as a key retail location and destination.

### Culture is a Differentiator for Cities

When it comes to culture, cities have an upper hand when compared to suburban environments. From theater, live music, and museums to population diversity and international cuisine, culture is a competitive advantage for urban environments. Union Square competes for foot traffic with other urban neighborhoods as well as with shopping areas around the region. Unfortunately, the District’s overall cultural experience is limited and adversely impacted by the street environment. For example, just blocks from the American Conservatory Theater, the Curran Theater, and August Hall, people unfamiliar with the neighborhood are encouraged to avoid blocks west of Powell Street, rather than to explore its cultural assets. For those making a trek into San Francisco for a show, a single unfortunate experience in the Tenderloin (the neighborhood just west of Union Square) is enough to make someone reconsider how they spend their time and money. This impacts the cultural community but also the Union Square District’s ability to leverage this differentiating

asset. An opportunity exists to add or partner with nearby cultural venues to prioritize eliminating any barriers to accessing theaters, live music, museums, and more.

### Urban Residential Drives Evening and Weekend Activity

Unlike office uses – which source foot traffic a few days per week with only one dominant daypart period (lunch) and occasional happy hour events – residential uses generate retail trips seven days a week, multiple times per day, and all day on weekends. This creates demand for shopping, personal services, fitness, and sit-down dining. Retailers prefer balanced neighborhoods but when they are forced to choose between an office-heavy or residential-heavy area, most choose residential neighborhoods. Urban residential is a key to driving activity at non-peak times and attracting retailers to a District like Union Square.

### Hospitality is Shifting Towards Smaller and Unique Hotel Stay Experiences

San Francisco's hospitality sector was among the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. As spending picks up and international restrictions ease, business and international travel are slowly returning to normal. The hospitality industry has also experienced tremendous growth in boutique and "soft brand" product, which are typically 100 to 200 rooms in size and operate under brands specific to a given property. Hotels such as the Ace in New York are credited with transforming entire neighborhoods within short periods of time, using active lobby experiences as "urban living rooms" for the community. The credibility and foot traffic they generate for the neighborhood can be substantial. While the room count in the Union Square District is high, newer trends in hospitality that include a curated sense of place and experience remain largely absent. The introduction of this offering would add depth to the local hospitality industry that would complement existing product and deepen the neighborhood's draw of people presently going elsewhere. These properties can induce a significant amount of buzz and foot traffic



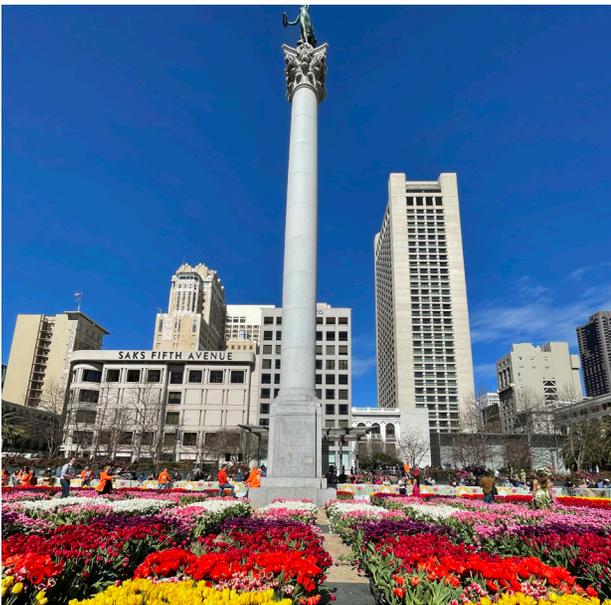
The hospitality industry has experienced a major shift toward boutique and "soft brand" hotels.



Union Square's famous cable cars embody San Francisco's unique culture, providing a competitive advantage.



Union Square must provide compelling reasons for people to bypass suburban shopping malls.



Union Square remains an imageable “urban room” and a recognizable plaza destination.

in neighborhoods. They also represent an opportunity to infuse high quality Food & Beverage destinations into neighborhoods where market rents are too high to sustain this use type. Introducing smaller and unique hotels could generate activity and add foot traffic that is not present today.

#### Urban Grit Makes the Union Square District Special but Can Also Act as a Barrier to Success

“Grit” and “patina” are elements that even suburban destinations sometimes attempt to replicate to evoke a sense of authenticity. While these naturally occurring elements give the urban realm a competitive advantage, the Union Square District increasingly competes with shopping malls and more tranquil environments for both tenants and consumers (both of whom have limited tolerance for certain conditions). Considering that a majority of the Union Square District’s consumers originate from parts outside of Downtown, there needs to be a compelling reason for them to bypass cleaner, safer, and more relaxing experiences. Moderating the most “gritty” elements of the District will be critical to eliminate barriers to Union Square's success.

## PUBLIC SPACE AND ACTIVATION

### Union Square Park and Plaza is an Imageable Urban Room and Signature Plaza Destination

Union Square Park and Plaza is managed by the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department and was reserved as a public square in the earliest days of San Francisco’s development. It is a dramatic open plaza firmly woven into the fabric of Downtown. It remains an imageable “urban room” and a recognizable destination that can once again, with the right programming and amenities, attract crowds to socialize, stimulate economic vitality, have fun, and celebrate.

### Retailing Dominates the Urban Form and Perception of the Area

Approximately 80 percent of Union Square District parcels have land uses that are visitor-oriented, including many department stores, hotels, performance halls, and boutique shops. Specifically, the area contains approximately 30 percent retail/entertainment, 28 percent mixed-use (with office), 12 percent office (management, information, and professional services), and 10 percent visitor-specific services. With San Francisco’s office vacancy remaining relatively high and only 14 percent

of parcels including any type of residential land uses, with only three percent indicated as entirely residential, an opportunity exists to grow the percentage of residential (non-visitor) uses within the District.

### [A Lively Atmosphere that Welcomes a Cross Section of the Region](#)

The Union Square District hosts a range of events that create distinctive opportunities to gather and celebrate. The Alliance holds major seasonal events, such as Winter Wonderland Holiday Market, that have a regional draw. Union Square Bloom, a season-long series of floral décor and engagement programming, was recently introduced to welcome office workers and visitors back Downtown. Through unique programming and business partnerships the Union Square District can energize Downtown and, in turn, the region.

### [Opportunities Abound for Public Art Experiences in the Public Realm](#)

Social commentary and creativity are embedded into the soul of San Francisco. City-goers are looking to experience unique cultural moments, and art is essential to welcome,

challenge, and beautify. Much of the art in Union Square Park and Plaza's public realm favors sculpture and monuments. Adding more intimate and uniquely San Francisco art and cultural displays throughout the District could heighten individual experiences and further beautify the District.

### [Union Square is Surrounded by Several other Unique Downtown Urban Neighborhoods](#)

The District sits in the heart of Downtown San Francisco as an enduring tourist destination (with more than 12,000 hotel rooms) and retail center. Surrounded by the unique areas of SOMA, Tenderloin, Nob Hill, Chinatown, North Beach, and the Financial District, these adjacencies allow visitors to Union Square an unusually rich opportunity to participate in a variety of urban experiences all in one trip, strongly distinguishing the Union Square District from suburban retail centers.



Adjacent districts support a variety of communities and attract visitors to the area, providing cultural depth.



City-goers are looking to connect with public art and experience unique cultural moments.



The walkable District includes BART stations, MUNI light rail, 41 bus routes, and two Powell Street cable car lines.



The availability of parking is critical to support increased foot traffic and retail sales.

### Local and Regional Accessibility is a Unique Asset

As a Downtown District, Union Square is accessible using automobiles, cable cars, busses, MUNI light rail, and BART. The city streets, as well as the Market Street subway line and the anticipated Central Subway line, opening in early 2023, link Union Square to the region bringing millions of visitors to experience San Francisco's rich urban environment.

Nineteen parking areas and two major BART stations (Powell and Montgomery) serve as District entry points. The walkable District also includes 41 bus routes and two Powell Street lines for cable cars, a quintessential San Francisco experience. The variety of ways to reach the Union Square District can build positive momentum if each mode reinforces the District's welcoming and special character.

### Parking is Available but Often Lacks Wayfinding, Lighting, Cleanliness and Safety

The availability of parking is critical to supporting pedestrian activity which, in turn, supports retail sales. This applies particularly to those living outside of the Downtown area, whether they are driving in to shop, dine, attend the theater, or go to work. This also applies to

U.S. visitors who prioritize certain standards, are less familiar with their surroundings, and are more likely to become disoriented. These visitors are also more sensitive to undesirable conditions. While the Union Square District is different from suburban offerings – and should embrace such differentiation – the neighborhood is competing for users who place a high priority on ease of access, cleanliness, and safety.

There is an opportunity to bring many of the elements of the parking experience enjoyed by visitors to Union Square's competition without sacrificing its unique urban attributes. This includes upgrading wayfinding effectiveness, employing clean and safe programs, and incorporating service-forward amenities (e.g., valet parking, concierge, daycare, pet care, and personal shopping). Parking garages that serve the Union Square District are due for upgrades that minimize user friction and enhance the user experience.

### Streets and Storefronts Lack People, Leaving a Disjointed and Unsettling Impression

In the past, Union Square District storefronts drove lively activity on the street. The District now struggles with a greater than 30 percent vacancy rate, with “For Lease” signs dominating many of the streets leading to the square. Even Powell Street, the main corridor between the Powell Street BART station and the square, has fewer people, more vacant storefronts, and uninviting roadway construction. However, in some areas storefronts are energized by dining, which suggest a variety of uses could fill spaces left vacant by the changing face of retail.

## PLANNING, POLICY, AND ADVOCACY

### Downtown Retail is the Dominant Zoning District

From a zoning perspective, Downtown Retail is the District’s largest designation occupying 62 percent of parcels. This requirement assumes much more retail space than the industry can currently support. The next largest category, Downtown General, occupies 22 percent of parcels within the District, much of which is unoccupied today. Recovery from the pandemic and strategic changes to stringent zoning requirements could reverse downward trends relative to foot traffic and sales.

### More Retail is Required by Code than the Market Can Sustain

The Union Square retail market has changed dramatically over the past few decades. Multi-story retailers are the exception rather than the rule. During the strategic planning process, brokers and property owners stated unequivocally that retailers who want to be in Union Square find themselves hampered by



The district struggles with a greater than 30 percent vacancy rate.



A return to the Downtown is still in its fledgling stages with increasing tourism and more workers returning to their offices.



Zoning designations require more retail space than the industry can support.



Virtually all ground and second floor space in the Union Square district is required to be retail.

a zoning code that, by restricting non-retail commercial uses in second and third floor spaces, effectively requires retailers to occupy both the first, second and sometimes third floors. This is space that modern retailers do not want or need, and most importantly, cannot afford. In Union Square, an amended zoning code could offer more flexibility to property owners and retailers.

#### [Collaborative Relationships are Needed for Success](#)

Some issues will be wide reaching and require multi-agency cooperation, while others will rely on more immediate resolution. Union Square Park and Plaza requires coordination with the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department for events, and constraints exist relative to the underground parking garage below the Plaza. Recology is a key partner in efforts to keep the streets clean, providing collection and disposal of municipal solid waste, recycling, and organics/compost to

commercial customers. Working with the San Francisco Police Department is also key to deterring crime in the Union Square District. Collaborative relationships with these groups, and many others, will be critical for the Union Square District to thrive.

#### [Data is Helping Identify Market Shifts](#)

Data is increasingly available to monitor and help decision making. The gathering, interpretation, and provision of information has become much more sought after. Identifying indicators and monitoring progress will be increasingly important for District success.

## ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

### Growth and Change Under Extraordinary Circumstances

The Alliance has grown from six staff members in 2016 to 15 staff members in 2022 and organizational roles and responsibilities have changed. The organization has evolved to address new concerns associated with the restructuring of the retail sector and the global pandemic. The Alliance is allowed, and at times encouraged, to move beyond its traditional clean and safe role based on the organization's track record of effective service delivery. Ensuring that Union Square Alliance's structure is aligned with the organizational vision and strategic priorities is critical for success moving forward.

### Strong Core Programs and New Expertise Central to Recovery

The Alliance's Executive Director oversees two primary director-led teams that carry out clean and safe services and undertake marketing and events. To address the economic vitality challenges currently facing the District, the Alliance will likely need to gain economic policy expertise and data development and analysis skills that can drive decision making. Adding new areas of expertise will help the organization be a resource for data and information about the economic performance of the District and support the organization's role as an advocate for a healthy business environment.



The Alliance has grown and organizational roles and responsibilities have changed in recent years.



The Alliance's Executive Director oversees director-led teams and will help integrate new staff and experience in the coming years.



The Alliance has evolved to address new concerns associated with the pandemic.



With director-led programming in place and experienced teams advancing their skills, a new set of associates will hold key positions.

## Solidifying Key Positions to Ensure Effectiveness

It is anticipated that in the fiscal year 2022-2023, a new Chief Operating Officer leadership position will keep the day-to-day activities of the organization running smoothly. With director-led programming in place and experienced teams advancing their skills, a new set of associates will hold key positions in clean and safe services, public realm, digital marketing, and economic development. Public realm activities used to be thought of as clean and safe only, but post-pandemic, the activation and condition of the public realm has become central to recovery strategies both in the Union Square District and around the country.

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## 2. PLAN FRAMEWORK

### The Future of 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 the Downtown's future trajectory, momentum, and ambitions**. Building upon an updated Mission and Purpose for the Union Square Alliance, the Strategic Plan is structured by a series of Vision Elements, Goals, and Priority Initiatives that guide action. Working together, the framework components in this chapter envision the District's bold and bright future while providing overarching direction for the specific actions and organizational structure detailed in Chapters Three and Four.

## MISSION

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.

## Mission and Purpose

The 2022 Strategic Plan defines a clear path forward for the Union Square Alliance for the next three years. While describing a bold vision for the future, the Alliance leadership, staff, and stakeholders revisited the organization's mission to ensure the group's charge is clear. To secure the vision, the Alliance Board and staff identified a new mission statement grounded firmly in the organization's core services and programs, charging the Alliance with **creating, managing, and promoting a high-quality visitor experience and advocating for Union Square's future success** as an economic, cultural, and civic hub.

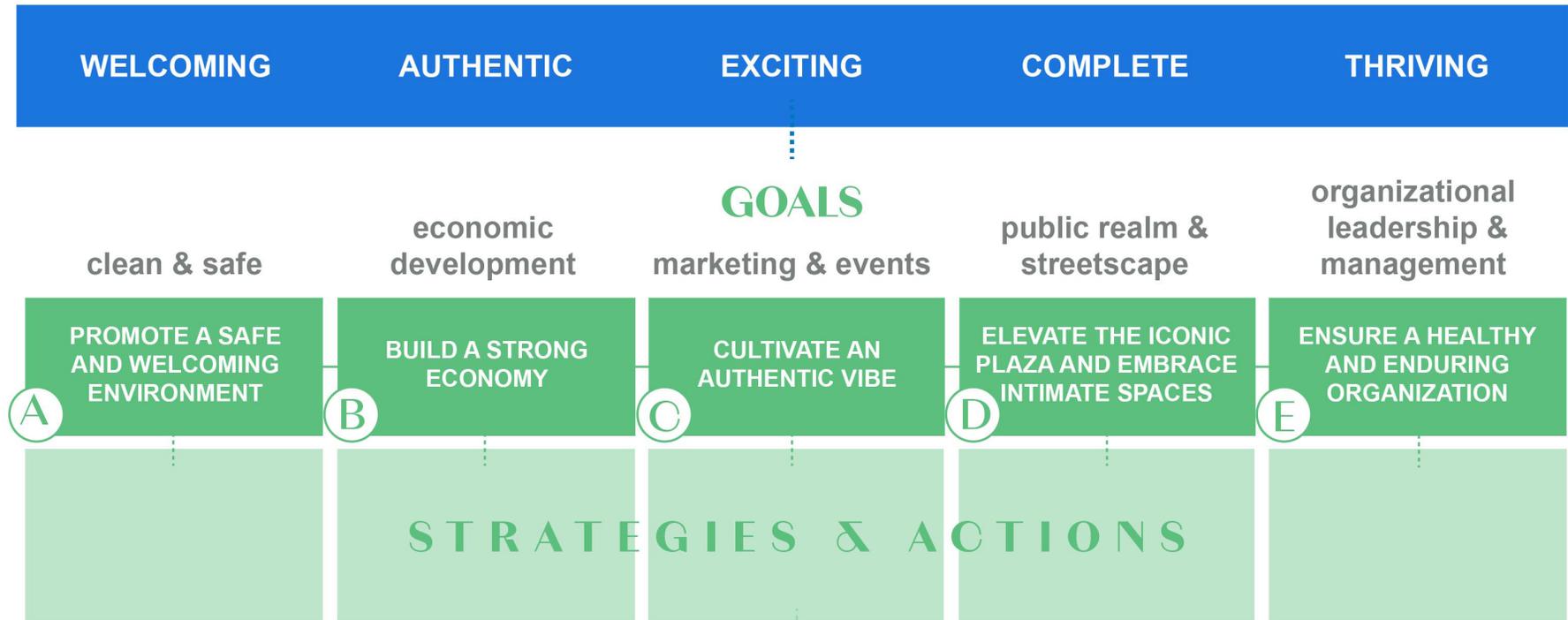
The Alliance prides itself on **inclusion, education, and communication**. These guiding principles inform all of the organization's actions. The Alliance is a trusted partner on the path to racial and social equity, infusing these values into all of the organization's endeavors. The Board, membership and partners all understand the mission, purpose, role, and function of the Alliance. Finally, the organization communicates its mission, purpose, role, and functions, working closely with its partners and the broader San Francisco community to address our shared challenges.

## Framework Components

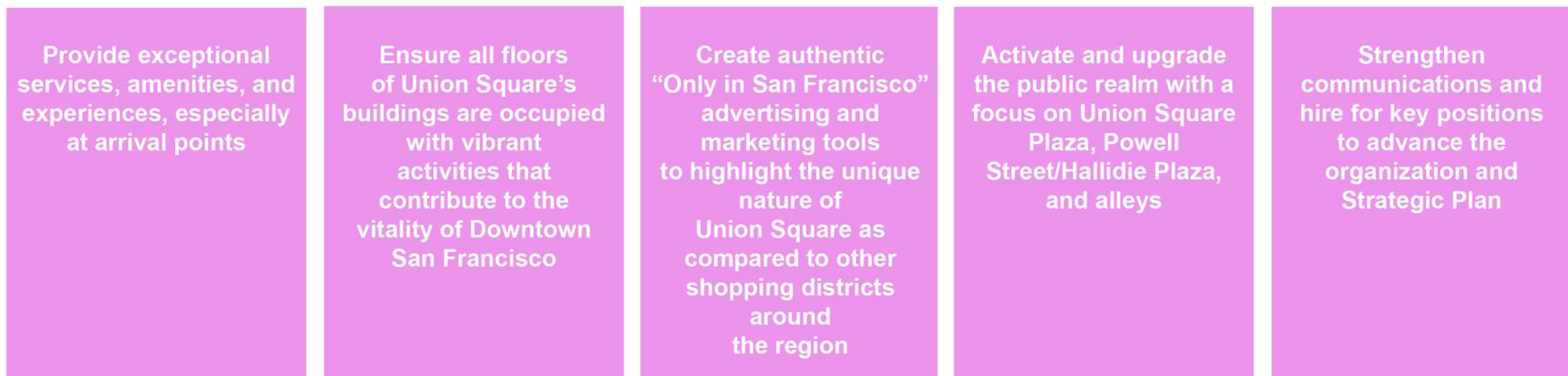
The framework diagram on the following page provides a high-level overview of the Union Square Alliance Strategic Plan. Five essential Vision Elements are supported by specific Goals that align with the Alliance's program areas, as well as Priority Initiatives that are top actions for supporting the Vision Elements and Goals.

The following pages describe the Framework Components in more detail.

## VISION ELEMENTS



## PRIORITY INITIATIVES



## VISION ELEMENTS

Vision Elements — **Welcoming, Authentic, Exciting, Complete, and Thriving** — are the defining characteristics that serve as the guiding foundation for the Union Square District’s future trajectory, momentum, and aspirations. These overarching principles help answer the question of “how far will we have come in the next five, 10, or 20 years?” The Union Square Alliance already embodies each of these Vision Elements in many ways. However, formalizing them into a framework and embracing them as aspirational targets provides focus to the plan’s strategic actions and initiatives, positioning the organization for continued success.

### 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.

## GOALS

The Alliance's focus on five tangible Goals will ensure important strides are made toward realizing the Vision Elements and charting a future of continued growth and success.

## PRIORITY INITIATIVES

A set of Initiatives makes the ideas in the Goal statements operational based on the Alliance's organization structure. The Priority Initiatives focus on strategies and actions that pave the way for achievable implementation.



### 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



### 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



### 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



### 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



### 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

## Physical Strategy Diagram

The **Physical Strategy Diagram** on the following page highlights the priority areas in which the Alliance will undertake the strategies and actions from the Strategic Plan. The physical environment — where people shop, work, live, and visit every day — must feel safe, comfortable, active, and welcoming at all times. Key activations and improvements will help Union Square continue to thrive as a world-class urban district.



Create special human-scaled experiences in alleys.



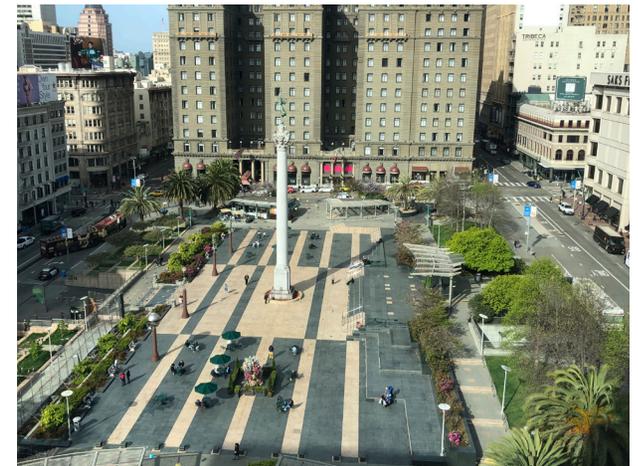
Expand on thriving luxury retail



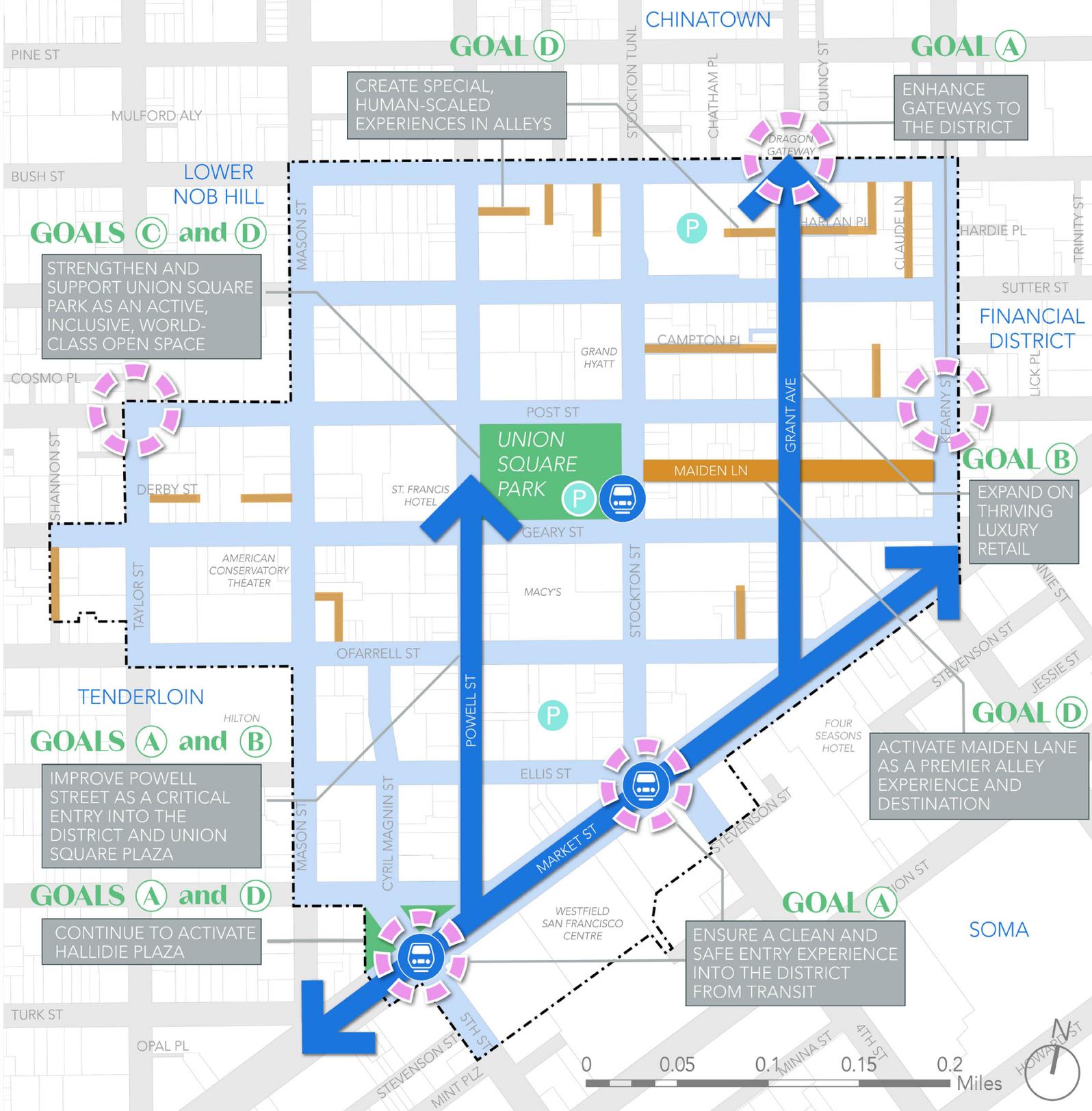
Improve Powell Street as a critical entry into the District and Union Square Plaza.



Continue to activate Hallidie Plaza.



Strengthen and support Union Square Park as an active, inclusive, world-class open space.



**PHYSICAL STRATEGY DIAGRAM**

**Legend**

-  BART/MUNI Station
-  Union Square District\*

\*Boundary includes streets adjacent to District for visual purposes only



3





## 3. STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

### Advancing Union Square

This chapter presents **specific initiatives and actions needed to implement the vision for Union Square**. This implementation strategy builds from the Vision Elements and provides specific details on how each aspiration target will be achieved. By focusing on five tangible Goals, the Union Square Alliance can help focus resources to ensure important strides are made toward realizing the Vision Elements and charting a future of continued growth and success.



The Alliance can work to develop initiatives that remove obstacles to food and beverage establishments in the District.



The Alliance can work with stakeholders and the City to develop a campaign around the revival of Downtown San Francisco.

## Goals and Strategic Actions

### IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

The following pages identify each of the five Goals the Alliance will focus on over the next several years to implement the Vision. Each of the Goals is supported by strategies that identify specific actions the Alliance and its partners will undertake to implement the Goals.

The Alliance has identified a Priority Initiative for each Goal with accompanying actions. Priority Initiatives and actions are highlighted on the first page of each Goal. The tables on the following pages identify the strategic actions that will be taken to accomplish each Goal, and include important information on timing, coordination, and funding resources.

### TIMELINE AND SUCCESS MEASURES

Strategies are organized into three important timeframes:

- **Immediate Strategies:** These are envisioned to be immediate actions (less than one year), programs, and projects that will help support the Union Square District in the near term.
- **Short-Term Strategies:** These actions (one to three years) will bolster the foundation of the Union Square District and position the area to successfully “bounce forward” once recovery from the pandemic is over.
- **Long-Term Strategies:** These long-term initiatives (more than three years) are anticipated to start within the time frame of the three-year plan, but may require a longer duration to complete. The strategies are identified because they are initiatives that will support the Union Square District into the future.

## PARTNERS AND ALLIANCE LEAD

Each strategy also identifies who will be involved in implementing the strategy (e.g., Alliance staff, Board Members, City/County, Business Owners, etc.) and the approximate cost or level of effort:

- \$ = Low cost and can be implemented relatively quickly.
- \$\$ = Moderate cost and may require more time to coordinate or implement.
- \$\$\$ = Higher cost that will require new resources in staff time, budget, or coordination.

## BEST PRACTICES

Each goal section is further supported by innovative **Best Practice** examples from around the world. These best practices illustrate successful similar implementation efforts.



Alleys can help activate and upgrade the public realm by creating intimate spaces.



Union Square's cable cars celebrate the genuine urbanity and exciting culture of the District.



# 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.

The foundation of a great experience in the heart of San Francisco is that workers, visitors, and residents feel like the environment is clean and safe. Demands to provide more services, and requests to take on a wider range of maintenance projects in the future, are increasing, even as City budgets continue to be

strained. In an era of increased competition and choice for customers, meeting this base-level expectation is critical. An opportunity exists to take on a greater leadership and advocacy role focused on larger community issues that impact the District, such as homelessness and transitions out of the justice system.

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

#### Top Actions

**A.1.1** Improve overall quality and visibility of service delivery for members including security, cleaning, trash collection, and pressure-washing by completing RFP for Clean & Safe services by June 2023 and Security by Dec 2023 \*

**A.1.2** Advocate with SFMTA and public garage management companies for permanent programs to clean and secure City parking garages, such as regular cleaning (pressure-washing) schedule, security services 24/7, and locked gates at night\*

**A.2.1** Continue security and police presence by maintaining Mobile Command unit in Union Square indefinitely, with emphasis on community-policing strategies, such as the ambassador program, 10 B officers, security firm, and the Police Department (PD)\*

**A.2.2** Convene a Union Square community-based Homelessness Task Force to develop partnerships for effective programs for those in need and launch program

**A.3.1** Institute curb-side valet parking for visitors in the central part of the District in order to promote a safe and welcoming arrival experience

\*Action is currently ongoing by the Alliance

Strategies	Actions	Lead	Timeline			Success Measure	Cost	
			< 1	1 - 3	> 3			
<b>A.1: Maintain a clean and safe public realm, prioritizing areas where people are welcomed to the District</b>	A.1.1	Improve overall quality and visibility of service delivery for members including security, cleaning, trash collection, and pressure-washing by completing RFP for Clean & Safe services by June 2023 and Security by Dec 2023	Director of Services	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Services plan <input type="checkbox"/> Cleaning schedule <input type="checkbox"/> Security strategy	\$\$
	A.1.2	Advocate with SFMTA and public garage management companies for permanent programs to clean and secure City parking garages, such as regular cleaning (pressure-washing) schedule, security services 24/7, and locked gates at night	MTA	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Map of garages <input type="checkbox"/> Cleaning schedule <input type="checkbox"/> Security measures	\$\$
	A.1.3	Explore installing additional lighting in key alleys	Public Realm Associate		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Lighting survey	\$\$
	A.1.4	Work with SFMTA and BART to increase focus on clean and safe sidewalks and plazas near transit stations, and bus stops to enhance the entry and departure experience	Director of Services		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Agreements with SFMTA and BART on baseline service levels <input type="checkbox"/> Number of requests <input type="checkbox"/> Description of response <input type="checkbox"/> Cleaning schedule	\$
	A.1.5	Develop contingency plans, both internal and with partner agencies, for service provision and communications during emergencies and for operational plans for the organization to ensure continuity of operations	COO	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Emergency plan	\$
	A.1.6	Review current provision of overnight member services and evaluate various alternatives	Director of Services	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Overnight service plan	\$

Strategies	Actions	Lead	Timeline			Success Measure	Cost	
			< 1	1 - 3	> 3			
<b>A.2: Develop an effective safety strategy to enhance safety throughout the District and focus on entry points to protect people and maintain an enjoyable experience</b>	A.2.1	Continue security and police presence by maintaining Mobile Command unit in Union Square indefinitely, with emphasis on community-policing strategies such, as the ambassador program, 10 B officers, security firm, and the Police Department (PD)	CEO	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Presence of police and security	\$\$\$
	A.2.2	Convene a Union Square community-based Homelessness Task Force to develop partnerships for effective programs for those in need and launch program	CEO	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Invite list <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting schedule	\$\$
	A.2.3	Continue and further develop the ability to respond to requests from the PD for camera footage and tracking related to incidents to assist with deterring crime by spending down grant from Dec 2021 to install cameras by end of 2023, and implementing and using technology for overnight alerts for possible safety and crime incidents	Director of Services / CFO		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Number of cameras	\$

Strategies		Actions	Lead	Timeline			Success Measure	Cost
				< 1	1 - 3	> 3		
<b>A.3: Enhance management of parking, curbs, and valet drop-off to help create an inviting experience upon arrival via automobile</b>	A.3.1	Institute curb-side valet parking for visitors in the central part of the District in order to promote a safe and welcoming arrival experience	CEO/COO	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Established valet location	\$\$
	A.3.4	Advocate with the Office of the Mayor and MTA for updated parking management elements, such as wayfinding and real-time information on signs and mobile devices	COO			X	<input type="checkbox"/> Parking management elements list <input type="checkbox"/> Installation timeline	\$

# BEST PRACTICE

## Key Initiative:

Provide exceptional services, amenities, and experiences, especially at arrival points

## Enhancing Public Safety with Advanced Information of Things (IoT) and Edge Analytics (Las Vegas, NV)

NTT Data is an information and communications technology company that develops data-driven solutions for organizations. The firm helped the City of Las Vegas deploy a smart edge network of HD optical sensors, sound sensors, IoT devices, and micro data centers to boost visibility and support better response decisions. The City wanted to improve situational awareness and responsiveness to public safety issues as well as drive innovative solutions in areas of mobility and economic development. Using AI and machine learning technologies, the system learns normal patterns in order to detect abnormal ones. This allows for situation-response decisions to be made in real time.

Through the use of NTT's technology, the City has:

- Improved public safety situational awareness
- Accelerated decision-making and responsiveness
- Provided edge analytics for actionable insights
- Reduced data storage needs dramatically
- Built the foundation for a more connected, smarter city



# BEST PRACTICE

## Key Initiative:

Provide exceptional services, amenities, and experiences, especially at arrival points

## A Strategic Lens on Downtown Parking (Winter Park, FL)

When the City of Winter Park developed its Complete Street and Bicycle Circulation Plans to advance multimodal access, the critical concerns of parking and vehicular access to downtown businesses remained unaddressed. This required the development of a comprehensive Downtown Parking Strategy (2017), which aimed to tackle three key issues: a lack of prime parking turnover; the underutilization of existing parking resources; and a need to modernize parking policies and practices to better align with community

expectations and prepare Winter Park for future conditions. A key recommendation in the plan is to provide a collection of centrally organized valet stands to support retail and restaurant use along the city's main retail corridor. This involves consolidating several valet stations into a single, networked service that allows users to drop their car off at one location and pick it up at any other location in the district. Technology makes this type of service more convenient than ever, as downtown residents, workers, and visitors can utilize a smartphone application that allows them to call for their vehicle without having to wait for service at the kiosk.





# 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.



San Francisco — like many other Downtowns across the country — is struggling to regain its “post-pandemic” footing. While fledgling signs of a strong recovery are visible, filling vacant space is the highest priority as empty storefronts create negative momentum. With remote work being a trend that is likely to

continue, people are looking for different reasons to visit urban centers; often choosing an exciting and urbane quality of life, and looking for new housing opportunities. New residents and creative office spaces together could bring entrepreneurial energy and activity to the Union Square District.

### 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

**B.1.1** Update Union Square District’s zoning controls for floors 2 and 3 to eliminate current emphasis on and requirements for retail uses on the first three floors, and instead, focus requirements for retail and related uses on the ground floor

**B.1.2** Update Union Square District’s zoning to permit, encourage, and remove obstacles to residential and office uses on all floors above the ground level

**B.2.1** Work with the City to explore and implement economic incentives and programs that fill spaces with desirable tenancies allowing properties to adapt so as to establish a District that is diverse in its retail offerings

**B.3.1** Pursue new tenants by developing a coordinated Tenant Recruitment Consortium (broker committee), including the Alliance, Office of Workforce Economic Development (OEWD), commercial brokers, and building owners; focus initial efforts on Powell Street corridor in coordination with public realm initiatives\*

\*Action is currently ongoing by the Alliance



Strategies	Actions	Lead	Timeline			Success Measure	Cost	
			< 1	1 - 3	> 3			
<b>B.1: Work with the City to pursue a program that “rightsizes” ground floor retail requirements and increases flexibility in upper floor zoning requirements to bring the Union Square District in line with current market realities to maximize diversity of uses, foot traffic, activity to the district, and economic benefit to business owners and to the City through taxes.</b>	B.1.1	Update Union Square District’s zoning controls for floors 2 and 3 to eliminate current emphasis on and requirements for retail uses on the first three floors; to instead focus requirements for retail and related uses on the ground floor	COO	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Board of Supervisors approval of Planning Code amendments	\$
	B.1.2	Update Union Square District’s zoning to permit, encourage, and remove obstacles to residential and office uses on all floors above the ground level	COO	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Board of Supervisors approval of Planning Code amendments	\$
	B.1.3	Work with the City 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 “traditional” retail uses	COO	X			<input type="checkbox"/> List of initiatives	\$
	B.1.4	Work with City departments to identify a process for streamlining permitting needed to facilitate economic recovery (including building and use permits)	COO		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Departmental coordination plan <input type="checkbox"/> Prioritization strategy	\$\$
	B.1.5	Adjust zoning controls, building code controls, and other regulations to ensure residential, office, institutional, and similar uses are permitted and possible on all floors above the first floor. Permitting these uses as “by- right,” streamlining the regulatory process, and offering incentives for residential conversions will fuel activity in these sectors.	COO		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Departmental coordination plan <input type="checkbox"/> Prioritization strategy	\$

Strategies		Actions	Lead	Timeline			Success Measure	Cost
				< 1	1 - 3	> 3		
<b>B.2: Pursue various economic and transactional programs, incentives, and strategies for improving the vitality of the District</b>	B.2.1	Work with the City to explore and implement economic incentives and programs that fill spaces with desirable tenancies allowing properties to adapt so as to establish a District that is diverse in its retail offerings	CEO/COO		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Economic incentives and programs list	\$
	B.2.2	Establish an advisory group of individuals with a variety of real estate, architecture, and planning backgrounds to target high-opportunity and/ or declining properties to advise on opportunities for strategic repositioning	COO/CEO		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Advisory group list <input type="checkbox"/> Agendas and meeting minutes	\$\$
	B.2.3	Explore partnering with a local development professional to assist property owners with "highest-and-best-use" services and desirable tenancies (public-serving businesses/community space) that explore and vet redevelopment opportunities	CEO/COO		X		<input type="checkbox"/> List of services <input type="checkbox"/> Property owner meetings	\$
	B.2.4	Work with existing and future hotels on specific opportunities to overcome hurdles that disincentivize the pursuit of food and beverage uses, such as permitting and taxation	CEO/COO		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Hotel group list <input type="checkbox"/> Agendas and meeting minutes <input type="checkbox"/> Engagement with hotel council	\$\$

Strategies	Actions	Lead	Timeline			Success Measure	Cost	
			< 1	1 - 3	> 3			
<b>B.3: Recruit tenants and developers to fill space and establish a diverse District</b>	B.3.1	Pursue new tenants by developing a coordinated Tenant Recruitment Consortium (broker committee), including the Alliance, Office of Workforce Economic Development (OEWD), commercial brokers, and building owners; focus initial efforts on Powell Street corridor in coordination with public realm initiatives	CEO/COO	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Consortium members list <input type="checkbox"/> Agendas and meeting minutes	\$
	B.3.2	Pursue pop-up retail tenants (short-term tenancies in brick-and-mortar locations) throughout the District, but especially on Powell Street, as both short-term and potentially long-term strategy	CEO/COO		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Establishment of formal pop-up program by City <input type="checkbox"/> Successful focus on Powell Street	\$\$
	B.3.3	Support the City in developing and preparing a persuasive narrative and high-impact data that can be provided at events, such as ICSC and NRF, to promote the Union Square District and raise the profile of the District as an important market	CEO		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Persuasive narrative <input type="checkbox"/> Data brochure <input type="checkbox"/> SF presence at ICSC and other events	\$
	B.3.4	At the discretion of meeting hosts, participate in meetings with prospective tenants and property purchasers	CEO		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Meeting list	\$\$

Strategies		Actions	Lead	Timeline			Success Measure	Cost
				< 1	1 - 3	> 3		
<b>B.4: Add economic policy and data development skills to the Alliance staff in order to help support economic revitalization</b>	B.4.1	Continue to develop and communicate virtual district tours via Visity or other to spur economic development in Union Square	Director of Marketing and Events	X			<input type="checkbox"/> District tour script <input type="checkbox"/> Web district tour	\$\$
	B.4.2	Augment economic data development by obtaining market research in long-term property and deal-specific data sets as well as private market research (i.e., CoStar, Placer.ai webinars, etc.)	CEO		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Data summary	\$
	B.4.3	Track economic health indicators for brokers, such as retail vacancies, sales tax revenues, property values, number of jobs by sector, hotel average daily rate, and office climate	CFO			X	<input type="checkbox"/> List of economic health indicators <input type="checkbox"/> Schedule for updates	\$
	B.4.4	Develop an audit / inventory of actual vacancies, as well as re-tenanting and development opportunities in the District	COO	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Audit schedule <input type="checkbox"/> Searchable inventory	\$

# BEST PRACTICE

## Key Initiative:

Ensure all floors of Union Square’s beautiful buildings are occupied with vibrant activities that contribute to the vitality of Downtown San Francisco

## Flexibility with Retail: the SoHo Broadway Initiative (New York, New York)

The SoHo Broadway Initiative (a Business Improvement District in New York City) — like Union Square — is characterized by a diverse set of both mass market and luxury tenants. The land use framework that defines SoHo as a destination commercial district has historically restricted large-scale retail, those with footprints of more than 10,000 square feet. Despite these restrictions, multiple tenants in the area sought and obtained special permits to supersede this threshold, leading to a revision of the city zoning code to allow for retail footprints of up to 25,000 square feet. In contrast, the land use and zoning code applicable to San Francisco’s Union Square is designed to strongly encourage large-scale retail over multiple floors. This undermines the ability of the District to support a balanced mix of retail sizes and types, and limits the District’s ability to offer unique, up-to-date offerings in what is an increasingly competitive retail landscape.

Today, SoHo is on the verge of a strong recovery and has retained a vibrant mix of both local and national retailers with divergent footprints. While national retailers continue to occupy multi-level stores, particularly along Broadway, which remains predominantly mass market in its appeal, the side streets have become places where more intimate retail, both national and local, prevails. Many smaller retailers occupy ground floor-only spaces of between 2,500 to 5,000 square feet and in some cases as small as 100 square feet. These smaller floor plans are increasingly more common as retail establishments pursue hybrid sales models and depend less and less on in-store sales. The lesson from SoHo is that retail will continue to occupy multiple floors when it makes economic sense — even in the face of zoning restrictions. However, retail with smaller formats will avoid locations in the face of zoning restrictions due in large part to their smaller economic footprint, resulting in a loss of an important market segment. The focus on smaller footprints, and flexibility for larger footprints when they make sense, has allowed SoHo to remain a destination for a mix of smaller established brands as well as exciting new retail concepts that keep the District fresh and relevant.



# BEST PRACTICE

## Key Initiative:

Ensure all floors of Union Square’s beautiful buildings are occupied with vibrant activities that contribute to the vitality of Downtown San Francisco

## Promoting Strong Economic Opportunities through Data, Dashboards, and Dealmaking (Washington D.C)

The mission of the Washington DC Economic Partnership (WDEP) is to promote the District’s economic and business opportunities. WDEP does this by maintaining information about the District’s economic climate; serving as a resource for primary analytics, data, and research; and supporting partnership-building between the public and private sectors. The Partnership is known for its award-winning reports and business guides that include district facts and Neighborhood Profiles.

It also maintains an online dashboard of data, maps, and infographics on its website. A significant component of WDEP’s work includes retail recruitment at the Dealmaking Forum of the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC), held annually in Las Vegas. In addition to participation in ICSC, the organization also sponsors a yearly “Retail Summit” that helps to highlight the District’s retail opportunities and brings together public- and private-sector partners.



During the May 2022 Board Retreat, participants created a Mood Board that identified elements - cool retail, art, fashion, lighting - for a thriving Union Square District. The District would contain beauty, be bold, and pleasantly surprise residents and visitors alike!





# 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.



Union Square sits in the heart of the Bay Area, an iconic region known throughout the world for its favorable climate and metropolitan City by the Bay. The vitality of the park, plaza, and surrounding area is intertwined with the city's history. Surrounding one of San Francisco's original grand public spaces and containing

a network of smaller spaces, the District has grown and evolved within the Downtown. The rich tapestry of old and new give the neighborhood a unique character and feel, which can be the foundation for special, one-of-a-kind offerings and experiences.

### **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**

**C.1.1** Create and execute a campaign strategy for marketing and advertise campaigns that highlight the uniquely urban nature of Union Square, such as cable cars, street activity, beautiful buildings, and a variety of close-by attractions

**C.1.2** 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

**C.2.1** 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\*

**C.3.1** Increase participatory and cultural programming in the plaza and throughout the District, such as dance, skating, art, and music\*

\*Action is currently ongoing by the Alliance



Strategies		Actions	Lead	Timeline			Success Measure	Cost
				< 1	1 - 3	> 3		
<b>C.1: Sharpen the Alliance’s communications strategy and embrace new platforms to reach San Francisco audiences and beyond</b>	C.1.1	Create and execute a campaign strategy for marketing and advertising campaigns that highlights the uniquely urban nature of Union Square, such as cable cars, street activity, beautiful buildings, and a variety of close by attractions	Director of Marketing and Events	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Marketing and advertising updates <input type="checkbox"/> Campaign list	\$
	C.1.2	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	CEO	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Campaign collateral <input type="checkbox"/> Participate in identifying large-scale PR strategy	\$
	C.1.3	Continue to refine and develop the District’s marketing and events calendar and communications strategy for greatest impact	Director of Marketing and Events	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Revised events calendar <input type="checkbox"/> Updated communications strategy	\$\$
	C.1.4	Continue to refine and improve the website and launch updates in Fall 2023 to be consistent with the refined vision and communication strategy and expand target audience	Director of Marketing and Events	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Website updates	\$\$
	C.1.5	Develop a social media strategy that will advertise the Union Square Park, plaza, and surrounding District as an exciting and fun place across all social media platforms including Tik Tok and creation of videos	Director of Marketing and Event Digital Marketing Associate	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Social media strategy <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation plan	\$\$

Strategies		Actions	Lead	Timeline			Success Measure	Cost
				< 1	1 - 3	> 3		
<b>C.2: Activate spaces with large-scale and unique art-based cultural displays, including outdoor public art, indoor exhibits, and distinctive galleries to highlight the City and its culture</b>	C.2.1	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	Public Realm Associate		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Marketing material	\$\$
	C.2.2	Develop a free-standing directory (wayfinding) and/or app that highlights exhibits and local galleries in the District (i.e., IKE)	Director of Marketing and Events		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Directory development strategy	\$\$
	C.2.3	Advocate with the City's Office of Cultural Affairs to identify critical artwork, installations, and cultural events that will draw people to the area	Director of Marketing and Events			X	<input type="checkbox"/> List of critical artwork, installation, and events	\$

Strategies	Actions	Lead	Timeline			Success Measure	Cost	
			< 1	1 - 3	> 3			
<b>C.3: Program participatory activities such as dance, skating, and musical performances to maximize activation with limited resources</b>	C.3.1	Increase participatory and cultural programming in the plaza and throughout the District, such as dance, skating, art, and music	Director of Marketing and Events	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Annual calendar <input type="checkbox"/> Communications strategy	\$\$
	C.3.2	Explore one or more current or new vendors that could be strategically deployed and have the capacity to hold individual events in a variety of locations throughout the District	Director of Marketing and Events  Director of Services		X		<input type="checkbox"/> List of vendors	\$
	C.3.4	Continue to refine current signature events and explore what resources would be required to consider adding signature events to increase foot traffic	Director of Marketing and Events		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Updated web page <input type="checkbox"/> Schedule for launch <input type="checkbox"/> Execution of signature events	\$\$
	C.3.5	Curate a set of walking tours for a unique place-based District-wide experience, such as viewing architecture, riding cable cars, and shopping and eating	Director of Marketing and Events		X		<input type="checkbox"/> List of destinations <input type="checkbox"/> Maps with walking routes	\$

# BEST PRACTICE

## Key Initiative:

Create authentic “Only in San Francisco” advertising and marketing tools to distinguish Union Square from competing shopping districts around the region

## Cultural Placemaking Helps Anchor a Truly Unique District (San Antonio, TX)

Managed by placemaking organization Centro San Antonio, Zona Cultural is a 44-block historic district on the western edge of Downtown San Antonio, rich with cultural institutions, markets, and public gathering places. As “the birthplace of San Antonio,” it enjoys a strategic location within the city, welcomes visitors year-round, and is home to many established businesses and long-term residents. Featuring popular destinations like Main Plaza and Market Square, the blocks of Zona Cultural are home to clusters of artistic and commercial activity. However, these activity hubs had historically been physically disjointed. Streets and public spaces lacked a consistent, coherent design identity and were

often challenging to navigate. With significant public and private investment — and a recent State designation recognizing Zona Cultural as a certified Cultural District — Centro San Antonio has cultivated this district as a place that exudes the “San Antonio Spirit”. These efforts include a streetscape master plan and design guidelines, a network of street art and murals, and a designated placemaking space that is to be activated with local offerings infused with a distinctive San Antonio flavor. All marketing and events collateral embody this unique experience, providing a cohesive and memorable brand that attracts community members and visitors to this beloved space.



During the May 2022 Board Retreat, participants highlighted the importance and value of cultivating an authentic San Francisco "vibe" for Union Square





# 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.

Union Square Park and Plaza is an important attractor for Downtown visitors. This iconic space is known globally and locally and provides a unique setting for events and festivals. A full, exciting suite of programming is needed and, while functional, the large urban space needs further investment to make it lively, active, and inclusive. Alleys, plazas,

sidewalks, and pedestrian connections can be as attractive for Downtown customers as venues such as stadiums and theaters. In a future of diminished public-sector resources, new public and private partnerships will be needed to nurture and promote the public realm.

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

#### Top Actions

**D.1.1** 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

**D.1.2** Work 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\*

**D.2.1** Develop short-, medium-, and long-range design plans that coordinate filling vacancies and replacing aged promenade to transform Powell Street into a unique cable car-centered promenade between Market and Geary or Post streets

**D.3.1** Create an intimate “urban room” in Maiden Lane, using seating, lighting, flowers, and other unique elements

\*Action is currently ongoing by the Alliance

Strategies		Actions	Lead	Timeline			Success Measure	Cost
				< 1	1 - 3	> 3		
<b>D.1: Focus on ambient placemaking and updating and refurbishing elements in Union Square Park to provide opportunities to engage and linger</b>	D.1.1	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	CEO/COO	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Role description <input type="checkbox"/> Official agreement	\$
	D.1.2	Work 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	CEO/COO	X			<input type="checkbox"/> List of daily activation	\$
	D.1.3	Manage logistics and coordinate food- and beverage-serving times with events to create a lively and inviting atmosphere that draws in more people	Director of Marketing and Events		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Event operations plan	\$\$
	D.1.4	Identify opportunities for everyday activation in the Union Square Park and plaza with strategies such as more tables and chairs that facilitate easy eating and drinking and other fun and engaging activities	Public Realm Associate			X	<input type="checkbox"/> List of activation elements <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation plan	\$\$
	D.1.5	Consider pursuing unusual and quirky products and menus in the Union Square Park and plaza and events that are uniquely San Francisco or that highlight unique San Francisco purveyors	Director of Marketing and Events		X		<input type="checkbox"/> List of unique SF products	\$

Strategies		Actions	Lead	Timeline			Success Measure	Cost
				< 1	1 - 3	> 3		
<b>D.1: Focus on ambient placemaking and updating and refurbishing elements in Union Square Park to provide opportunities to engage and linger</b>	D.1.6	Examine successful funding models, such as Bryant Park, NYC, to eventually adopt models and mechanisms that help support activation	CEO/COO		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Funding model summary	\$
	D.1.7	Work with Recreation and Parks to install a series of occasional high-profile art pieces to bring large-scale and high-impact civic art to the Union Square Park and plaza that will create buzz	Public Realm Associate		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Marketing collateral <input type="checkbox"/> List of prospective art pieces	\$\$
	D.1.8	Consider a strategy for future park redesign that adds softscape, shade, and children’s play areas to Union Square Park and plaza (in coordination with continued safety measures)	Public Realm Associate			X	<input type="checkbox"/> Preliminary timeline <input type="checkbox"/> Redesign strategy	\$\$
	D.1.9	Advocate for strategies for activation events that are more financially feasible for a variety of event sponsors to remove barriers and encourage a broad set of groups to hold events in the space	Public Realm Associate		X		<input type="checkbox"/> List of target groups <input type="checkbox"/> Revised fee structure	\$

Strategies	Actions	Lead	Timeline			Success Measure	Cost
			< 1	1 - 3	> 3		
<b>D.2: Transform the corridor anchored by Powell Promenade/ Hallidie Plaza to draw people from the edge to the heart of the District</b>	D.2.1	Develop short-, medium-, and long-range design plans that coordinate filling vacancies and replacing aged promenade to transform Powell Street into a unique cable car-centered promenade between Market and Geary or Post streets	Public Realm Associate	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Promenade description <input type="checkbox"/> Tenant pursuit plans \$\$
	D.2.2	Explore future activation events in Hallidie Plaza, with a focus on short concepts that help make the space feel more inviting	Director of Marketing and Events		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Events calendar <input type="checkbox"/> Marketing collateral \$

Strategies		Actions	Lead	Timeline			Success Measure	Cost
				< 1	1 - 3	> 3		
<b>D.3: Enliven intimate spaces to add depth and texture to the District to encourage exploration</b>	D.3.1	Create an intimate “urban room” in Maiden Lane, using seating, lighting, flowers, and other unique elements	Public Realm Associate	X			<input type="checkbox"/> List of elements needed <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation plan	\$\$
	D.3.2	Map a collection of District-wide small spaces and rooftop hideaways that include smaller plazas, viewing spots, and privately owned public open space (POPOS)	Public Realm Associate		X		<input type="checkbox"/> List of destinations <input type="checkbox"/> Maps with walking routes	\$
	D.3.3	Approve the additional lighting project and continue to refine the quality of lighting to support evening and nighttime events	Public Realm Associate	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Completion of lighting project	\$\$
	D.3.4	Advocate for strategies to streamline approval for, or when appropriate, to allow activation events, such as concurrent review with various City departments or expedited permitting	CEO/ Public Realm Associate		X		<input type="checkbox"/> List of approvals targeted for streamlining	\$

# BEST PRACTICE

## Key Initiative:

Activate and upgrade the public realm with a focus on Union Square Park and plaza, Powell Street/Hallidie Plaza, and alleys

## Art to Animate and Activate (Berlin, Germany)

In November of 2019, the Berlin Festival Week commemorated the 30th anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall by transforming Germany’s capital city into a large open-air exhibition and event location. A floating art installation called “Visions in Motion” was constructed at the Brandenburg Gate using 30,000 ribbons that reflected the wishes, hopes, and memories of people in the community and from around the world.

Spanning over more than 100 meters where the former wall once divided the city, the exhibit was comprised of thousands of feet of rope, streamers, and other materials arranged in an elegant, colorful pattern. Harnessing available wind, the artwork undulated in a gorgeous, immersive display. Visions in Motion highlighted the ability for public art to both advance conversations around contentious societal issues while also activating the space and piquing public interest.





# 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.

The Alliance's elevated role through the pandemic response creates opportunities to develop partnerships that both reach new constituents and also expand to existing audiences. To capture economic activities in the future, the Alliance must work directly with City and regional agencies to coordinate

and amplify its messages. Accordingly, the organization itself must be adequately structured, staffed, and resourced to perform its important functional roles; effectively communicate and advocate; build and sustain an array of partnerships; and fulfill the goals

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

#### Top Actions

**E.1.1** Advocate with the City for clear and direct lines of communication, including a designee from the Office of the Mayor as a primary contact that attends regular monthly/bi-monthly meetings

**E.2.1** 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\*

**E.2.2** Hire an Executive Assistant for the Executive Director (CEO) to help support and enable advocacy work\*

**E.2.3** Create a part-time Chief Financial Officer (CFO) position to maintain financial expertise and retain institutional knowledge

**E.2.4** Explore hiring additional positions and/or consultants to address various programmatic needs as funding allows

\*Action is currently ongoing by the Alliance

Strategies	Actions	Lead	Timeline			Success Measure	Cost
			< 1	1 - 3	> 3		
<b>E.1: Advocate to the City and other audiences to position the Union Square District as one of the best urban districts in the world</b>	E.1.1	Advocate with the City for clear and direct lines of communication, including a designee from the Office of the Mayor as a primary contact that attends regular monthly/bi-monthly meetings	CEO	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Designee identified \$\$
	E.1.2	Advocate for regular City coordination meetings, such as a semi-annual meeting with both the Mayor and the District 3 Supervisor, to coordinate initiatives	CEO		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Meeting schedule \$
	E.1.3	Consider forming a Downtown Districts Sub-Committee of the San Francisco Benefits District Alliance (SFBDA) to structure an approach for joint advocacy	CEO			X	<input type="checkbox"/> Committee membership <input type="checkbox"/> Joint advocacy strategy \$
	E.1.4	Partner with key downtown advocacy groups for coordinated City communications on critical topics, such as flexibility of uses	CEO		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Partnership description <input type="checkbox"/> List of leadership initiatives \$

Strategies	Actions	Lead	Timeline			Success Measure	Cost	
			< 1	1 - 3	> 3			
<b>E.2: Strengthen the Alliance by strategically adding skills and staff that are needed for the evolving services required for the District to thrive</b>	E.2.1	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	CEO	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Job description <input type="checkbox"/> Additional staffing	\$\$\$
	E.2.2	Hire an Executive Assistant for the Executive Director (CEO) to help support and enable advocacy work	CEO	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Job description <input type="checkbox"/> Additional staffing	\$\$\$
	E.2.3	Create a part-time Chief Financial Officer (CFO) position to maintain financial expertise and retain institutional knowledge	CEO	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Job description <input type="checkbox"/> Additional staffing	\$\$\$
	E.2.4	Explore hiring additional positions and/or consultants to address various programmatic needs as funding allows	CEO/ COO	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Job description <input type="checkbox"/> Additional staffing	\$
	E.2.5	Develop regular staff outings and team-building events as well as measuring staff engagement to develop deeper team cohesion	CEO		X		<input type="checkbox"/> Schedule <input type="checkbox"/> Program outings	\$\$
	E.2.6	Ensure financial sustainability for Alliance programs by developing alternative funding, including sponsorships, government and private foundation grants, and contributions	CFO	X			<input type="checkbox"/> List of alternative funding <input type="checkbox"/> Action plan	\$
	E.2.7	Conduct Union Square Foundation planning to define role vis-a-vis the Alliance as support and fundraising partner, and further develop USF Board and fundraising capability	CEO/CFO	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Foundation fundraising plan	\$
	E.2.8	Update fiscal policies and accounting procedures to align with new organizational structure and to truly capture costs and revenues of major Alliance programs	CFO	X			<input type="checkbox"/> Revised policies and procedures	\$

# BEST PRACTICE

## Key Initiative:

Strengthen communications and hire for key positions to advance the organization and Strategic Plan

## Chicago Loop Alliance (Chicago, IL)

The Chicago Loop Alliance (CLA) developed a strategic plan that provided focus and direction for the organization's activities over five years from the plan's inception. The organization's leaders and stakeholders identified a bold new vision of the Chicago Loop as a vibrant global business center and recognized world-class destination. To secure that vision, Loop stakeholders created a clear mission statement firmly grounded in the organization's history, charging CLA with creating, managing, and promoting high-performing urban experiences to attract people and investment to the Loop.

The plan articulates the organization's core values and competencies; presents a detailed series of strategic objectives, projects, and programs; outlines specific indicators and metrics; and highlights key actions related to organizational and governance structure. Since the implementation of the strategic plan, the Alliance has been able to increase membership, transform the public realm, and hire several full-time staff to execute the Plan's vision.



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4



## 4. ALLIANCE STRUCTURE

### Evolving the Union Square Alliance

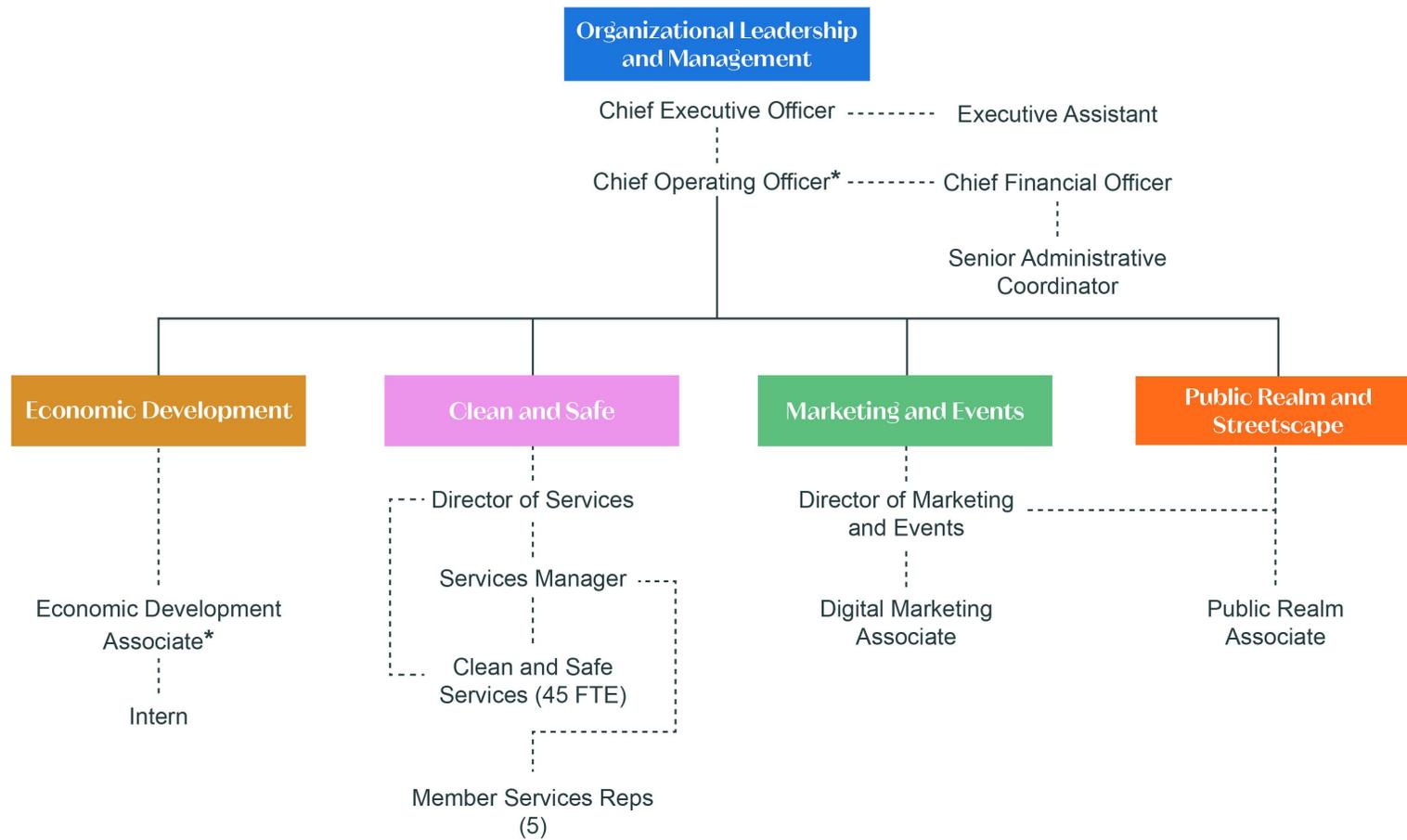
The Alliance has grown from six staff members in 2016 to 15 staff members in 2022 and organizational roles and responsibilities have changed. Central to recovery and improving the District's economic vitality, **specific services and areas of expertise are needed** in response to growing demands.

The Union Square Alliance and the Union Square Foundation, a primary fundraising vehicle for the Alliance, have experienced tremendous change over the last two years. The organizations have grown and evolved in the context of extraordinary circumstances associated with the restructuring of the retail sector and a global pandemic.

The Alliance is moving beyond its traditional clean and safe role while maintaining those core services. The organization's capability to provide services and run events is expanding to a broader focus on the public realm. The Alliance is also well positioned to be a champion of the District and take on a greater economic development role. This chapter identifies the elements needed to ensure that the Union Square Alliance has the necessary staff structure, resources, and partnerships to advance the Strategic Plan.



# Union Square Alliance Proposed Organizational Chart



*\*New position*

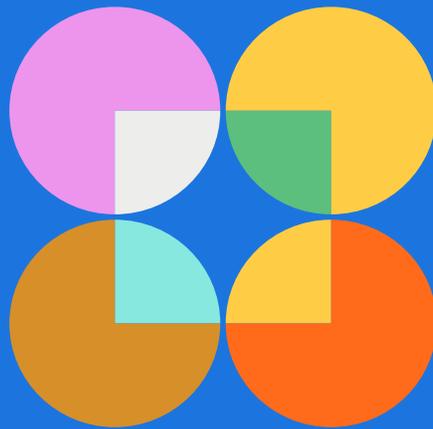
The Organizational Chart outlines the staffing structure for the Union Square Alliance for the coming three to five years.

## Resources and Partnerships

Collaborative relationships will be critical for the Union Square District to thrive. Some issues will be wide reaching and require multi-agency cooperation, while others will rely on more immediate resolution.

- Union Square Park and plaza is a city park located on top of a parking lot, owned by the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department, which requires coordination with this key agency for park events.
- Recology provides collection and disposal of municipal solid waste, recycling, and organics/compost to commercial customers and is a key partner in efforts to keep the streets clean.
- San Francisco Police are an important partner to help deter crime in the Union Square District.





# Union Square Alliance Strategic Plan



streetsense.