



**TODCO GROUP CENTRAL SOMA COMMUNITY PLAN: KEY TOPIC**  
Integrating Community Building Public Open Spaces And Private Green Spaces In New SOMA Office Development

Both the Planning Department’s proposed Central Corridor Plan and this Community Plan would significantly expand future development of large office buildings in Central SOMA. These will have major urban life impacts on the Neighborhood, for better or worse – which makes the zoning requirements for their open space and eco-district integration a crucial decision.

Current Zoning Open Space/Green Space Rules for Office Buildings

Today new office development is allowed in Central SOMA in the longtime C3 “downtown” Districts and the MUO (Mixed Use Office) areas – the former SSO District created in 1990 – established by the 2010 Eastern Neighborhoods rezoning.

**The open space requirements for the MUO District office development today are practically worthless.** As a result, several projects have been proposed recently that would cover almost their entire lots with 85 foot high office boxes that have little or no public open space at all, and add no amenity to adjacent alleyways. There is no requirement for “green” features either.



**Useless POPOS at 370 Third Street**



**Useless POPOS at 300 Second Street**

One square foot of open space is required in MUO Districts now for every 50 square feet of office space. So a 150,000 square foot office project (about average for the current “in fill” development proposals) must provide only 3,000 ft of open space. And that space can be

completely private – for example, a roof deck exclusively for the office tenants. If it is “public” (now generally referred to as “POPOS” – privately owned public open space), then the requirement is further reduced by 1/3, so only 2,000 ft would be needed. The lot size for such a building (typically 6 floors due to high ceilings desired by the Tech Industry) would be about 25,000 sq ft, which means less than 10% at most would be open space – but it could actually be 0%! Typically developers are proposing a small sterile entry court at the building’s main entrance, calling that “public” open space, and then putting the rest on the roof as private landscaped open space for the offices. **Such projects are an urban insult to their surrounding Neighborhood.** In some cases, the Planning Department is also recommending storefront retail space be included on the arterial street sidewalks to provide an “active” streetscape, but nothing on the alleyways.

Developers do have the option to pay an in-lieu fee to the City instead of providing the required open space on site that might provide funding for renovations of the nearby public parks that need it – South Park, SOMA Recreation Center, and Draves Park – or could fund new open space in Central SOMA. Currently the fee is about \$86 per sq ft of required open space (which would total about \$2,400,000 maximum for such an average office building). However, these funds go instead to the Eastern Neighborhoods Public Benefits Fund **without any requirement to be used in SOMA at all!**

Likewise, office projects do pay the additional Eastern Neighborhoods Community Benefit Fee that also might theoretically be used for those purposes. It is currently about \$14 per foot of total office building floor area (which would total \$2,100,000 for such an average office building). But again, there is **no requirement that these funds be used in SOMA at all!**

**There are also no current requirements for eco-district “green space” in new office developments – especially the acres of wasted roof areas that could instead be used for solar energy, living roofs, urban agriculture or habitat, in addition to terraces for office tenants to use.**

#### Draft Central Corridor Plan Open Space/Green Space Rules For Office Buildings

- **The Planning Department’s Draft Plan** (Implementation Strategy 3.1) **does propose that all required open space in “non-residential” future development – including office buildings – must be public.** This is an important improvement, but merely catches up with the rules for C3 District open space adopted in the last Century 30 years ago!
- But the Draft Plan **does NOT absolutely require that it be located at street level** (proposing only “careful review”), and it does NOT provide any further details about its character or design.
- Nor does it provide any option for payment of an in-lieu fee in the C3 areas of the Central Corridor, **nor describe how in-lieu fees would best be used in Central SOMA.**

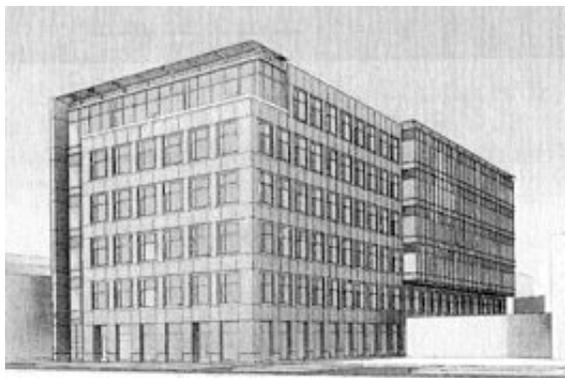
- Except for a very few specific locations, it **does not address how to activate these POPOS, nor how to use them to enhance adjacent alleyways** and create new pedestrian networks to connect them.
- And the Planning Department’s Draft Plan does not – at least, not yet – propose any **requirements at all for incorporation of eco-district “green spaces”** in any kind of development at all.

TODCO’S Central SOMA Community Plan For Open Space/Green Space Rules For Office Buildings

Unlike the Department’s Plan, our Central SOMA Plan proposes comprehensive requirements for office building open spaces and green spaces that will result in **top quality City/Community Building worthy of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**.

For Public Open Space:

- **All required public open space must be located at grade and be generally open for public use.**
- When the development site is adjacent to streets/alleyways designated for “greening” in the Central Corridor Plan, such as proposed Bluxome Street Park, the open space must be next to it and designed to **expand and enhance the public improvements**.



505 BRANNAN STREET  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA  
12-1:  
**Proposed 501 Brannan Dead Zone On Bluxome Park**



**501 Brannan If POPOS Expanded Bluxome Park**

- When the “in fill” development site is constrained with minimal street frontage, an interior **courtyard or atrium with easy public access from the sidewalk** could provide the required open space. This should be **required for projects adjacent to the I-80 Freeway** due to its unhealthy air quality and noise. A significant advantage of interior public open space is its **all-weather usability/amenity**.

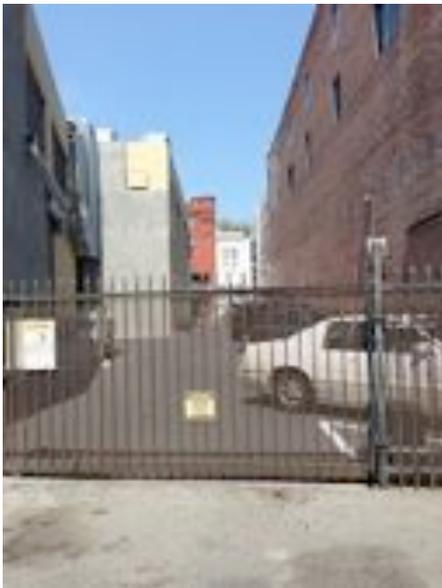


101 Second Street Atrium Sidewalk Level



101 Second Street Atrium Balcony Level

- When the development site includes surviving **former rail spurs** right of ways, those must be retained as open space and **integrated into new pedestrian routes** connecting multiple parcels, streets, and alleyways to the extent possible, even if their area exceeds the amount of required open space.



Old Railspur ROW To Second Street



Old Railspur ROW To Third Street

- When the site is adjacent to an alleyway, some part of the required open space must be **adjacent to the alley and enhance its amenity.**

- All **public open spaces must have adjacent storefront retail space to activate them**, with room for outdoor seating, etc., especially on adjacent alleys where “pop-up” retail locations of 500 sq ft or less **add essential Neighborhood scaled activity and small business opportunities**. Accompanying **parklets** can further enhance alleyway **amenity** where space allows.



**Ritch Alley Mini-Retail**



**Darwin Mini-Restaurant with Parklet on Ritch Alley**

- **No formula retail** must be allowed in new developments. The metastasizing of chains in new office development downtown has been their most utterly cheapening and City-character-destroying consequence – “anyplace USA.” This would be absolutely unforgiveable throughout SOMA.



**200 Third Street Chain Store Dead Zone**



**795 Folsom Street Chain Store Dead Zone**

- All public open spaces must include **elements of “green” landscaping** as well. **Cheap minimal landscaping** and little-used **hard surface sterile plazas will not satisfy** open space requirements. And **trees that will grow to large size** must be included to add real neighborhood amenity to the cityscape.



**85 Ft Tall 30 Year Old Trees And Gardens Soften Dead Zone Impact Of Office Block**

- Large Scale **Public Art in POPOS** can become a stunning element of the cityscape. But it should **reflect the character of the Bay Area's dynamic arts communities** (Burning Man, etc) rather than generic anywhere-in-the-world modern art now typically displayed.
- Water features – fountains, etc. – are a wonderful amenity, but their pumps are also very energy-use intensive. All **water features must be powered from renewable energy generated on-site.**



**401 Second Street S Generic Sculpture**



**401 Second Street POPOS Fountain**

- **Detailed public open space design standards** approved by the Planning Commission, but not inflexibly written into the Planning Code, will guide implementation of these requirements.

For Green Space on office building rooftops **in addition** to required Public Open Space, all roof areas not required for building mechanical, service, safety, and communication systems **must** be used for:

- Private **landscaped open space for office tenants'** use.
- Large-scale **solar energy** installations.



SOMA Solar Retrofit Installed 2013



SF Mart Roof Terrace

- **Urban agriculture and/or habitat.**
- **“Living/Green” roofs.**



“Old” SF Federal Building Roof

- **“Blue” roofs** (rainwater recycling).

Because of their large footprints, **the roof areas for future office buildings are the single largest potential “green” resource in all of Central SOMA**, and construction of these “green” features is well within the scale of their development financing. Details of these

crucial eco-district elements are described in this Community Plan’s Eco-District Key Topic. **It would be an abject failure of civic vision not to make the most of their opportunity.**

“Green” Parking Limitations For New Office Development

Except for the necessary building services/loading/refuse facilities, there is **no reason to allow public or private commuter parking** in new office development in the Central Corridor – given that **the entire premise for its proposed “densification” is its unique access to public transit!**



**Typical Office Garage Entrance Alley Dead Zone**



**Typical Office Basement Garage Dead Zone**

Therefore our Central SOMA Community Plan **absolutely limits all parking** in future office development to parking spaces **permanently dedicated only to car share, car/van pool, bicycles, motorcycles, and electric vehicles** (for the CEO’s), etc. with the proportionate required accessible spaces for each as applicable.