



TODCO GROUP CENTRAL SOMA COMMUNITY PLAN: KEY TOPIC [Major Update 4/15] **A Real Community Building Eco-District**

The overarching Vision of our Central SOMA Community Plan is to build the South of Market Neighborhood of the 21st Century. That requires three basic “plans” – Economic/Urban Development, Social Justice/Community Building, and Environmental Responsibility/Sustainability – all directly engaged and inter-linked with each other.

The Planning Department’s Central SOMA Eco-District Evolving Concept

The Planning Department proposes formal establishment of a Central SOMA “Eco-District” in some format to institutionalize the Environmental Responsibility/Sustainability elements of its Central Corridor Plan. Currently the draft Plan’s Sustainability Chapter serves as a place-holder for this concept. It states:

An Eco-District is a district where neighbors, community institutions, and businesses join with city leaders and utility providers to meet ambitious sustainability goals and co-develop innovative projects ... The Central Corridor Plan Area has been identified by the Planning Department as a Type 2 Eco-District.

TYPE 2: THE PATCHWORK QUILT

The Type 2 Eco-District is characterized by its mix of land uses and is comprised of undeveloped, underdeveloped, and developed land owned by different property owners implementing development projects under different time-frames. This type of Eco-District focuses on aligning development timeframes to maximize opportunities to meet environmental goals. It also works closely with the community to build on its existing character and to integrate the physical qualities of the area as part of its character.

An Eco-District provides a way of achieving ambitious sustainability goals at the neighborhood or district level. Establishment of an Eco-District brings neighbors, community institutions, businesses, city leaders and utility providers together to co-develop innovative solutions to address water use, energy conservation, waste reduction and other needs. This broad partnership fosters the implementation of community-driven projects which blend the physical and cultural environment to explore new possibilities in public space and enhance the experience of an area.

Eco-Districts use a set of performance metrics to guide and shape such projects, and to

monitor their progress over time. Creating Eco-Districts provides a practical vehicle for the City to achieve the goals of our Climate Action Plan, Electricity Resource Plan, and Green Building Ordinance; as well as to meet community-developed goals that are specific to the district at hand.

The Eco-District Plan will be created in collaboration with area stakeholders under the guidance of the Central Corridor Eco-District Formation Task Force, and developed on a separate but parallel track with the Central Corridor Plan. It will be comprised of two parts: a policy framework and an implementation program. The Implementation Program will be a stand-alone piece that will prioritize projects for the area and establish a path for implementation, including identifying funding sources.

To achieve success as an Eco-District, a neighborhood - in partnership with the city and other public agencies - must create a shared vision for the area. Engaging public and private stakeholders to work together, share ideas, and establish partnerships for the area is a primary component of District Organization.

These are laudable intentions. The initial Task Force the City set up to draft this starting-point “policy framework” completed its initial conceptual “Recommendations” for what this new Eco-District may address in the Fall of 2014. But follow-up implementation planning is proceeding very slowly.

In March of 2015 DCP Staff published a draft Sustainability Policy paper that continues to propose a Central SOMA Eco-District which would include a Water Plan, an Energy Plan, and a Habitat/(Greening) Plan. But it includes few new details.

A Community Building Eco-District

From the TODCO Group’s community perspective, a “community building” eco-district imaginatively utilizes the technocratic tools of “sustainable design” to bring important community Visions to reality, and in the process brings community stakeholders together in an organized way to work proactively, cutting across lines of class and culture, to contribute to a neighborhood’s equally-valuable long term “social capital.”

Central SOMA offers several outstanding opportunities for such an eco-district Vision.

“Greening” The I-80 Freeway

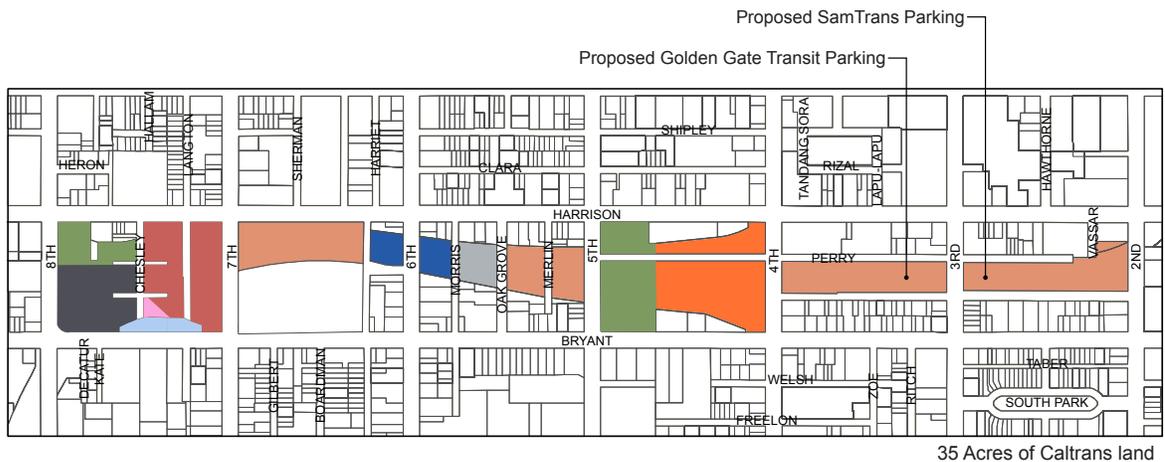
The 60 year old I-80 (James Lick) elevated Freeway is by far the largest physical structure in SOMA, blighting 16 acres of SOMA land owned by CalTrans, and it is an eco-monstrosity:

- Its overall “carbon footprint” is enormous.
- Its public health impacts – local noise and cumulative regional air pollution (reaching even the Central Valley) – are significant. The everyday east-bound traffic jams continue to get longer in both several hours duration and several miles back-up distance.
- Its psychological impacts on the community – its ugliness and local street ramps

congestion (including not-uncommon “road rage”) – are overwhelmingly negative. At night it is “scary” to walk beneath it.

- It physically and visibly splits SOMA in two for its full length from the Bay Bridge to the Mission District, creating a palpable urban/community life barrier between north and south.
- The many acres of urban/neighborhood land beneath its elevated structure are mostly wasted on commuter parking lots and cheap landscaping.

Caltrans Right of Way - Current Uses DRAFT
South of Market, 8th Street to 2nd Street



- PUBLIC PARKING LOT
- CONSTRUCTION SITE AND STAGING
- PLANTING/SHRUBS
- MUNI STORAGE
- CITY AND COUNTY OF SF PARKING
- AUTO RETURN
- GMCC EMPLOYEE PARKING
- CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY PATROL
- HALL OF JUSTICE VEHICLE SERVICE STATION

But because the Freeway has been here for decades and is undeniably a crucial regional transportation artery, we have all become inured to its urban brutality – co-dependents – and so failed to even attempt to re-imagine a better incarnation of it for the next 60 years. A full-scale Community Building Vision to “green” I-80 might include:

- Maximized horizontal and vertical landscaping, including many large trees (redwoods?) to offset carbon impacts and completely change its psychological perception from the Neighborhood – even for car drivers. Some locations may be appropriate for specific Urban Habitat landscaping.

- Incorporation of large scale public art works along its length to break up its monolithic character into discrete “places.” In particular, the “arrival” point at the Fifth Street ramp touchdown is an extraordinary opportunity for a major civic identity artwork of very large scale.
- Complete architectural treatment of the SOMA streets’ undercrossings beneath it to convert today’s ugly gauntlets into attractive portals that join the north and south parts of the Neighborhood together visually. There are good examples of this from around the world.



Pont-Max-Juvenal-Aix-En-Provence, France



Lightrails



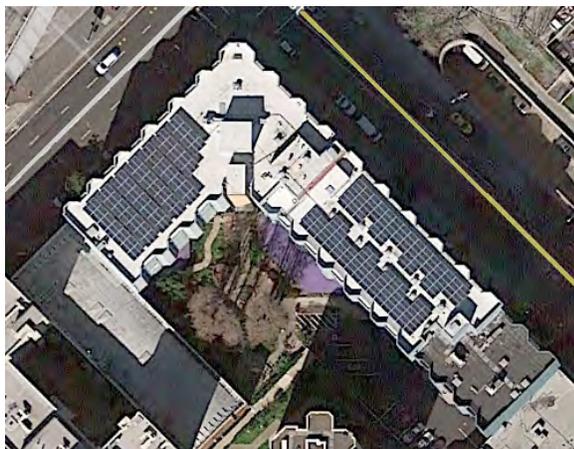
- Conversion of the parking lots under the Freeway to environmentally beneficial purposes, such as car share terminals, bus/van off-peak storage lots, secure bike parking, and all others that will help reduce auto commuting and/or a need for Neighborhood residents to own cars. And in fact, Caltrans has agreed to replace public parking lots between Second and Fourth Streets with new bus layover yards for AC Transit and Golden Gate Transit (completed in 2014). But these projects simply enclose those lots with new sound walls with no urban design value.
- Locations can also be provided for other Neighborhood needs such as dog zones, recycling centers, etc. that are too big or difficult to locate elsewhere.

CalTrans would have to be fully committed to Greening I-80. CalTrans must be invited to work with any SOMA eco-district as a key participant.

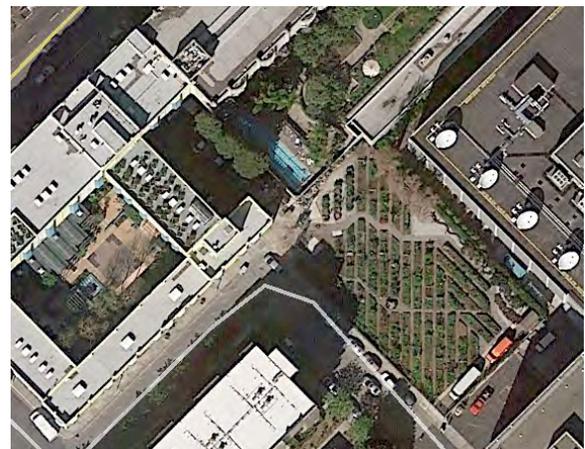
“Greening” Central SOMA Neighborhood Roofs

The Google Earth view of SOMA is of course dominated by the roofs of all its buildings. They all add up to an extraordinary amount of wasted urban space – the Neighborhood “roof plane.”

- A fraction is always needed for building mechanical systems, vents, etc., but most of the rest is simply unused conventional roofing.
- Some properties [count] have small landscaped decks for their residents or office tenants to enjoy.
- Only two, both TODCO Group properties, have community gardening beds on their roofs for residents of those multi-family buildings.
- A number [count] of properties have also installed solar energy equipment – in past years typically solar hot water systems for building space heating, and more recently photovoltaic systems for house meter electric supply.



TODCO Woolf House Photo-Voltaic Solar Power Panels



TODCO Mendelsohn House Roof Garden and Alice Street Community Garden

These many unused acres of the SOMA Neighborhood Roof Plane have meaningful potential, including:

- Large scale retrofitting of older buildings' roofs with photovoltaic systems, usually at the same time a replacement roof is needed to be installed (typically, 20/30 year cycles), along with a mandatory requirement for installation of photovoltaic systems on the otherwise unused roof areas of all new buildings over a certain size. On a lifecycle basis, the costs of these systems now “pay for themselves.”
- For new housing developments, allowing rooftop open space to satisfy their projects' on-site open space requirements (for residents, not publically accessible), provided that a large part of these areas are dedicated to Neighborhood Agriculture/Habitat use (see below).
- In particular, for future multifamily projects a mandatory requirement to provide community garden planters on site for a certain proportion of their residents.

The SOMA Neighborhood Urban Agriculture/Habitat Realm

The flora and fauna of SOMA today have never been thought of as an ecological system. There are certainly thousands of gardeners even now, and many critters here too. Our few parks are mostly mere grass, and artificially removed from any real “ecosystem” – the one exception being the lovely small Butterfly Garden in Yerba Buena Gardens. So the potential for a much more organized and better understood plant and animal realm management plan in SOMA is enormous, and might include such elements as:

- The widespread rooftop gardens recommended above would be ideal. Besides community gardens for residents, their design could include specific habitat elements for local and migratory birds – hummingbirds for example. And when marijuana is legalized, a very substantial home industry community might quickly develop in SOMA.
- The maximal I-80 Freeway landscaping recommended above could include substantial areas optimized for particular local and migratory bird species. Habitat for beneficial insect species, such as bees, could also be incorporated.
- Additional street level community gardens on small lots that would be acquired by the Park Department, replicating in large total numbers the very popular Langton Street Garden on Folsom Street.
- A requirement for the landscaping of City parks and “POPO's” (privately owned public open space) included in new office buildings and other commercial developments throughout SOMA to include specific habitat zones similar to Yerba Buena Gardens' Butterfly Garden.
- The Plan would also address the circumstances and impacts of problematic species, such as rats and pigeons, and human behavior that interacts with it, such as messy bird feeding and poor trash management. Particular attention might be focused, for example, on the (feral) alleycats common throughout SOMA.

Making It All Real

Clearly there is no shortage of great concepts for a Central SOMA Eco-District and specific projects that would advance its goals.

Actually getting things done, however – given the City’s notorious red tape, bureaucracies, and seemingly endless planning processes – is much, much, much harder. And then ultimately it takes funding.

The Planning Department’s Central Corridor Plan is the one ongoing City legislative process on a definite timeline with the requisite supporting environmental and legal underpinnings. It is expected to be finally approved by the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors in the first half of 2016.

Thus the first and most realistic opportunity to implement Eco-District initiatives will be the new City Master Plan and **Planning Code provisions** of the Central Corridor Plan, along with mandatory Mitigation Measures specified by its Final EIR.

And it is reasonable to anticipate that Plan will also identify several **specific immediate follow-up planning processes** – as part of its “**Implementation Plan**” – that the Planning Department would then undertake starting later in 2016 for completion in 1-2 years with subsequent final approval of the outcomes by the Planning Commission.

It is also possible that “**trailing legislation/projects**” will be defined and scoped as part of the Central Corridor Plan that would follow a separate independent track, especially if within the province of other City agencies, that would also start later in 2016. And in fact one such project, the MTA’s Howard/Folsom two-way street reconfiguration project, is already included in the Plan’s EIR.

A key assumption of this Community Plan is that Eco-District initiatives that are not specifically included in one of these three groupings within the Central Corridor Plan are very unlikely to actually get done.

Thus from the TODCO Group’s community perspective, these are the several key Eco-District initiatives to include in the three respective groupings:

Planning Code Provisions and EIR Mitigation Measures

Given the transformative scale of the future new Central SOMA commercial development encouraged by the Central Corridor Plan – millions of square feet of new office buildings – this has the greatest potential for new Planning Code/Guidelines requirements that will implement Eco-District concepts.

This Community **Plan Topic - New Office Development** outlines these in detail, including:

- Mandatory provision of new **POPOS** at street level with new green landscaping guidelines.

- **Mandatory use of all available roof areas** for private open space, solar energy, or “green roofs.”
- **Prohibition** of monthly parking spaces for single-occupant gas-powered commuter parking in building garages.

Trailing Legislation/Projects/Funding

To the extent any of these or other new building requirements described above legally need to be located in the **Building Code** (or other City codes) instead of the Planning Code, separate legislation will be need to be developed in conjunction with the Department of Building Inspection (or other applicable City agencies).

And to the extent that the proposed **Central SOMA Eco-District** will become a quasi-governmental district of some kind with regulatory and/or funding authority, it will need a follow-up formation process culminating in **charter City legislation**.

One approach newly-available as of 2015 to fund future Eco-District projects on public property – including CalTrans Freeway land – would be to establish an “Enhanced Infrastructure Finance District” for portions of Central SOMA. That can include a range of financing tools, include Mello-Roos facilities bond financing, tax increment financing, and more. It is now the most flexible approach possible.