

Urban Land Under Forces

–The Progress and Setbacks of San Francisco's Urban Transformation Since 1950

Introduction

When wandering the streets of San Francisco, one can hardly fail to notice the undulating topography of the city. The densely packed grid of roads sprawls over the landscape, enabling us to view the seemingly infinite extension of each path. (Fig 1) Yet when you see the vehicles climbing the road slowly in the distance, you suddenly realize that San Francisco has been living with the ups and downs all the time. The city's natural geographic features have always imposed a significant influence on its urban development. San Francisco digests and negotiates with the natural forces it confronted, thrives via acclimation, and redevelops after stagnancy.

Starting around 1950, redevelopments were deployed in San Francisco in response to the perceived decline of specific areas, but the efforts yielded somewhat different outcomes. While some redevelopments gradually brought back the dynamics with new public features, others failed. Western Addition is a large urban area of San Francisco that encompasses hundreds of blocks. During the urban renewal in the 50-the 60s of the 20th century, 'slum clearance' and housing displacement influenced many families and relevant communities within this area. Since the 1990s, it gradually experienced gentrification, and the once lively street became vapid. On the contrary, the transformation of San Francisco's Northern Waterfront gained certain degrees of success, especially in terms of its engagement with the public. The decline of the functioning port did not end with a demise but with a revitalization.

What has led the developments of these two areas towards such polarized directions?

There have been studies on the transformation of both areas, especially on the waterfront. Jasper Rubin has written about the waterfront transformation since 1950 with chronological narrative and images.¹ Alison Isenberg focused on how different art professions infused their ideas to participate in the waterfront development.² The discussions over the urban renewal of the Western Addition area are mostly criticisms due to its relatively negative influence on the

¹ Jasper Rubin, *A Negotiated Landscape: The Transformation of San Francisco's Waterfront Since 1950*. 1st ed. Chicago, Ill.: Center for American Places at Columbia College, 2011.

² Alison Isenberg, *Designing San Francisco: Art, Land, and Urban Renewal in the City by the Bay*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017.

site, such as Rachel Brahinsky³ and Walter Thompson's⁴ articles. In the meantime, the original plans from the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, surveys, and plans conducted by the city planning department and other government agencies are potent sources for examining the progressive design and comparing it with its current condition.

While both areas gained individual research on their transformation since the urban renewal, there has not been much focus on the contrast between the two. However, I found this comparison rather potential as it may shed light on how different interplay of forces lead to the distinct urban transformations; since the city of San Francisco is essentially the accumulation of all the previous forces that it has once taken on, both natural forces and human interventions. This essay will start with briefing the city's urban development related to the narrative topic of 'forces,' depicting how various forces have shaped San Francisco's configuration. In the following two chapters, the thesis will dive into the Waterfront and the Western Addition area separately, tracing how these two areas have experienced different transformation paths since the 1950s. Based upon studies of the two, the comparison will be derived in the last chapter as a lesson that we may learn from for future urban development strategies. The main study is based on the original planning documents, maps, literature, and my previous visit to these areas.



Fig 1. The undulating topography under the street grid (2017). Photo taken by the author

³ Rachel Brahinsky, "Fillmore Revisited – How Redevelopment Tore Through the Western Addition", [sfpublishpress.org](https://www.sfpublishpress.org), Sep 23, 2019, <https://www.sfpublishpress.org/fillmore-revisited-how-redevelopment-tore-through-the-western-addition/>

⁴ Walter Thompson, "How Urban Renewal Destroyed The Fillmore In Order to Save It", [Hoodline](https://hoodline.com), Jan 03, 2016, <https://hoodline.com/2016/01/how-urban-renewal-destroyed-the-fillmore-in-order-to-save-it/>

I. The City under Forces

- The Initial Grid, Piers, and The City

San Francisco is essentially a city of hills, with more than 40 hills scattered within the city boundary. However, the city's road network seems to be at odds with this geographic feature. Instead of applying circular networks around these hills, the city's grid is a sea of rectangles with distortions only around a few significant hills. This layout decision can be traced back to the outset of its urban development. In the official map of San Francisco in 1849 (Fig 2), two uniform grids converge along Market Street, regardless of the ups and downs that fall inside this area. (Fig 3) This rigid street grid persists during the subsequent transformations and is now where the most bustling area of downtown San Francisco locates. In a sense, the ignorance of the inhospitable terrain presents as a strong human force that shapes the city, but the natural landscape that underlays this city is always there. Being in the city nowadays, you will always see the undulating topography. The natural force constantly asserts itself.

Meanwhile, its geographic features also catalyzed some positive developments. Located at the northern tip of the San Francisco Peninsula, the city is gifted with deep channels and an expansive bay. Marine-related industries flourished along the city's waterfront with piers and

warehouses. From the Fisherman's Wharf to the India Basin, the strip of urban waterfront stretches 11 kilometers, characterizing the city's periphery with claw-like finger piers. Most of the piers 'were built between 1912 and 1930, primarily to service ferryboat and shipping activities.'⁵

The field of the street grid and the port morphology feature prominently in the urban fabric of San Francisco. They exemplify how the city has been digesting and negotiating with the natural forces at the early stage of its urban development.

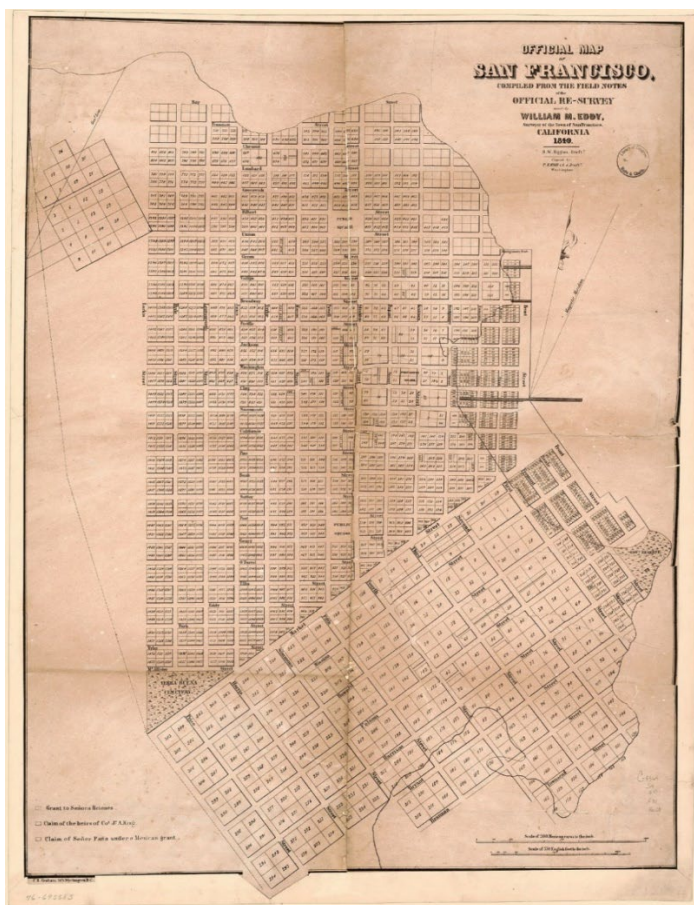


Fig 2. The official map of San Francisco (1849), surveyed by Jasper O'Farrell in 1847. In this very early development of the city, the grid already dominated the planning.

⁵ Rubin, A *Negotiated Landscape: The Transformation of San Francisco's Waterfront Since 1950*, 23

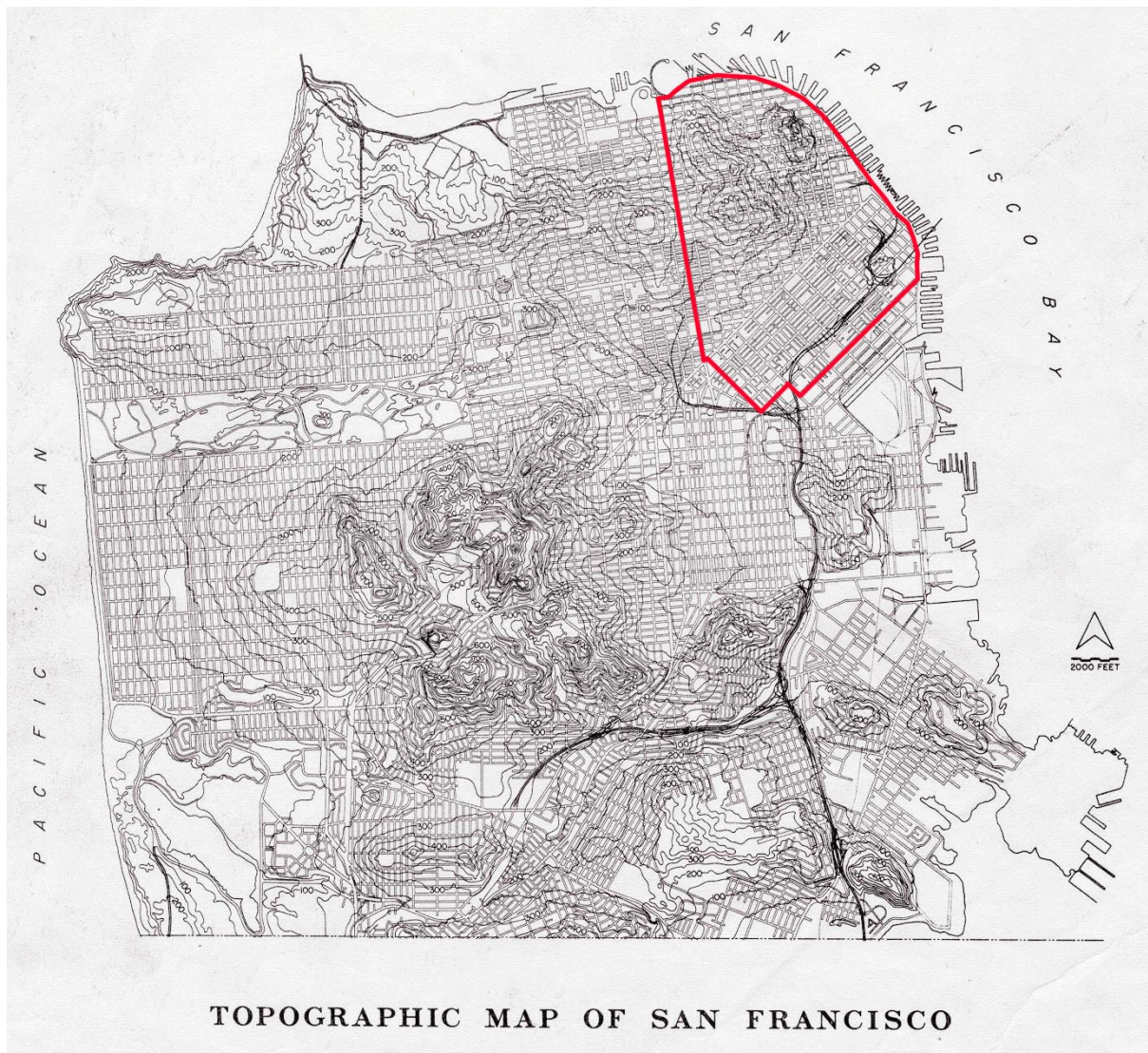


Fig 3. The topographic map of San Francisco (1960). The area defined in Fig 1 is marked in red (by author). The grid was laid out irrespective of the hilly topography there.

- Construction, Deconstruction, and Reconstruction

Apart from the somewhat static geographic influence, the earthquake has harassed this city a couple of times, throwing the city into deconstruction and reconstruction again and again. Rebecca Solnit argues that 'a place like San Francisco could be imagined not as one city stretching out since 1846 but dozens of cities laid over each other's ruins'.⁶ In 1906 and 1989, devastating earthquakes shook the city out of its shape. Restoration usually dominated the post-disaster reconstruction, which tended to recover the integrity of the old brick and mortar. Therefore, one can barely capture the presence of this intimidating disaster force just by looking at the current city. The path dependency of the urban planning eventually engulfed the ruins and digested them into the strata of the cityscape. However, when some of the deconstructions dovetailed with the demolition proposals from the planning department or government agency,

⁶ Rebecca Solnit, "The Ruins of Memory". *After the Ruins, 1906 and 2006: Rephotographing the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, 18

the disaster's force might, in return, catalyze the implementation of some plans that had been retarded by the bureaucratic redundancy and boost some transformations.

- Ceaseless Acclimation

As argued previously, Franciscans have been using their way to acclimate to the landscape, yet the acclimation would not be a solution once for all. The essential geographic quality barely changed within our perceived scale, but technologies and materials evolved quickly. Especially after WWII, the restructuring of the economy rendered some parts of the previously built environment obsolete. When the new containerization technology prevailed in the shipping industry, the once prosperous port with geographic advantages was contrarily limited by its site and situation. Its inability to accommodate larger-scale operations eventually resulted in the decline of the waterfront in the 1950s. In this sense, humans seem to have once succeeded in harnessing the natural forces, but later they were confined by the forces.

Meanwhile, the eagerness and pressure to acclimate San Francisco to the new economic structure also posed another kind of force. At that time, the soaring development of Manhattan on the east coast turned up as an alluring example to follow across the United States. Still, it gradually became such a standardized and rigid mode that critics began to rethink the bulldozing way of urban renewal.⁷ The urban design of San Francisco from that time eventually involved interactions between very diverse groups of people, both professional and unprofessional participants. These interactions can also be viewed as forces. They diverged, conflicted, coalesced, and all together shaped the urban transformation of San Francisco. The urban fabric is a clash of all these forces.

II. The Northern Waterfront Transformation

- The Waning Port Function

In the early stage of the postwar development of the Bay Area, the manufacturing industry used to thrive along San Francisco's waterfront by capitalizing on their adjacency to the inputs, which could save transportation costs before and after processing. However, with the prevalence of new methods of transportation and production, these waterfront sites no longer enjoyed the positional advantages anymore. As early as 1900, there has already started a decentralization of the manufacturing industry from the waterfront of San Francisco to the suburbs of the Bay Area in Oakland and Contra Costa, where horizontal production structures could benefit from the spacious land and cheaper labor force.⁸ Furthermore, the promotion in

⁷ Critics such as Jane Jacobs and Grady Clay have in depth research in urban renewal. See Isenberg, *Designing San Francisco: Art, Land, and Urban Renewal in the City by the Bay*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017, 8, 15 -20

⁸ Richard Walker, "Industry builds the city: the suburbanization of manufacturing in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1850-1940", *Journal of Historical Geography*, Volume 27, Issue 1, 2001, 36-57.

the infrastructure network facilitated the goods distribution at a lower cost, which further eclipsed the cost advantage of the waterfront location. In 1956, the *Federal-Aid Highway Act* was enacted, with the authorization of 25 billion dollars to develop the Interstate Highway System.⁹ This action was carried out to feed the urging infrastructural need for trucking and undoubtedly boosted the development of trucking even more.

As the industrial activities decreased, San Francisco slowly transferred into its post-industrial phase, which experienced drastic changes in its urban settings. In 1968, the employment of services and finance-related sectors increased by 46% and 32% compared to 1953.¹⁰ The built environment reflected this transformation in several aspects of the waterfront neighborhood. In a relatively mild way, some previous food processing plants and warehouses were adapted into consumption-oriented businesses. For example, the Del Montes Food Plant No.1 ceased its operation in the mid-1930s and was later transformed into a marketplace. In this sense, the morphology of the urban landscape was still preserved. In contrast, as the dominating types of business shifted to the service and financial sectors, more office buildings and residential blocks were also erected upon which used to be the warehousing sites. As part of the expansion needs of the downtown Financial District, these drastic changes in urban fabric simultaneously introduced more intense flows of traffic and people, increased the rents, and thus deteriorated the living condition for the remaining maritime-related business.

Among all the densified changes in the Northern Waterfront neighborhood, two imposed rather significant influences on the physical built environment. The first one is the construction of the Embarcadero Freeway that abruptly separated the Ferry Building from the city side. (Fig 4) This physical isolation continued marginalizing the port's activities and suffocated the city's visual access and physical connection to the waterfront, which took decades of struggles later to break through. The second is the substitution of the old Produce Market by the Golden Gateway Redevelopment in the 1960s. (Fig 5,6) The sweeping changes in this area eliminated the functional space that the adjacent port once had an affinity with and exacerbated the clashing between the port logistic operation and the citizen flows.¹¹

Starting from 1958, containerization was ushered into cargo transportation and handling, which became the last straw. Due to the adjacency of the hilly topography to the Northern Waterfront, minimal flat space can be expanded inland to accommodate the extensive facilities required for containerization. Additionally, the developed urban fabric has been densely weaved into the edge of the city, which would make it somewhat costly and devastating to carry out any bulldozing. A changing role for the Northern Waterfront was inevitable under the interplay of all the forces.

⁹ Richard F. Weingroff. "Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, Creating the Interstate System", *Public Roads*, Federal Highway Administration, 1996, 60

¹⁰ Rubin, *A Negotiated Landscape: The Transformation of San Francisco's Waterfront Since 1950*, 68

¹¹ *Ibid*, 79



Fig 4. The Elevated Embarcadero Freeway, circa 1960. The Freeway physically block the city's access to the waterfront around the Ferry Building neighborhood.

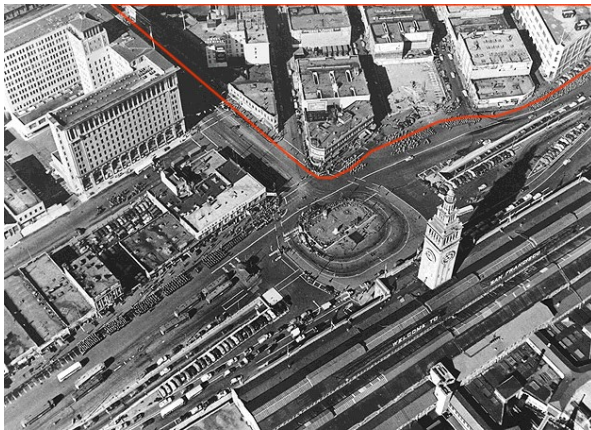


Fig 5. The Old Produce Market that expands several blocks (marked red by author), 1947



Fig 6. The Golden Gateway Redevelopment Area replaced the old produce market with housing, office, and shops. (marked red by author)

- The Slow Process in Redevelopment

As discussed in the previous chapter, the built environment that surrounded the Northern Waterfront has gradually changed since 1950 due to the declination of maritime-related

activities. However, the changes that happened in the de facto port areas were more of degenerations than evolvments. This discrepancy between the port area and its neighborhood was mainly derived from their jurisdiction separation. At that time, the port was a state agency embedded in the physical context of the city, whereas the adjacent areas were subjected to the city's zoning code and land-use policy.¹² When the whole city was shifting to its post-industrial state, the planning policy would keep up with the pace, which enabled the waterfront neighborhood to evolve accordingly. However, under its individual authority, the port lacked some long-term policy for its redevelopment and thus got disconnected from its immediate context that is controlled by the city.

In 1959, invited by the port authority, Ebasco presented a report entitled *Facilities Improvement Survey for the San Francisco Port Authority*. The report clearly stated the infeasibility for the Northern Waterfront to continue its cargo handling operation and averred that:

Until recently, there had not been a complete and full understanding between the city officials of the City and County of San Francisco and the Port Authority. Consequently, there is no up-to-date development plan for the San Francisco waterfront area. Now, however, a working understanding has been reached, and this should be mutually beneficial.¹³

From here, one can see that both the port and the city realized the incongruence of their visions, and there were intentions to collaborate. In 1966, the city planning department and the port authority commissioned consulting firms to analyze the port's activities.¹⁴ The result of this coordination was refined into the *Northern Waterfront Plan*, which advocated the shifting of shipping activities to the south and cautious redevelopment of the Northern Waterfront to respect its natural qualities and historical values.¹⁵ As the planning department adopted the plan, height limitations and zoning regulations came into play to control excessive commercial development along the shore.

This coordination and consensus towards the waterfront's future between the two agencies shed light on the necessity of getting the port back to the city after the partial obsolesce of its maritime function. In 1968, the State transferred the jurisdiction of the waterfront back to "the City and County of San Francisco via the Burton Act" and required the city to found a Port

¹² Rubin, *A Negotiated Landscape: The Transformation of San Francisco's Waterfront Since 1950*, 79

¹³ Ebasco Services Incorporated., and San Francisco Port Authority. Port of San Francisco, *Facilities Improvement Survey for the San Francisco Port Authority*; Summary Report, 1959, 11

¹⁴ For details, see *The Port of San Francisco: An In-depth Study of Its Impact on the City, Its Economic Future, the Potential of Its Northern Waterfront. A Report to San Francisco Port Authority* by Arthur D. Little, Inc and John S. Bolles Associates

¹⁵ Rubin, *A Negotiated Landscape: The Transformation of San Francisco's Waterfront Since 1950*, 134. The description here is partially based on Rubin's summary towards the plan. To refer to the original document, see San Francisco (Calif.). Department of City Planning. *Northern Waterfront: A Report*. San Francisco: Dept. of City Planning, 1969.

Commission to manage the port further.¹⁶ With the port now being a city agency, this move eliminated some extent of the administrative dissonance between the two sides, making it easier to implement the policy and regulations formulated by the planning department.

However, this transfer did not bring an end to the stagnant process of the Northern Waterfront redevelopment. In fear of the waterfront being stuffed with privatized properties and ecological deterioration, local groups tried to find ways to exert their pressure. In 1961, the Save San Francisco Bay Association was founded, excelling at “launching lawsuits and intervening in court proceedings related to major development proposals.”¹⁷ Later in 1965, Senator J Eugene McAteer coauthored the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC). Although its jurisdiction is limited to the bay water and its tide-affected areas, this agency still managed to exert influence over not only the quality of the water itself but also the accessibility of the waterfront to the public.¹⁸ Because BCDC formulated the *Bay Plan* to limit dredging, filling, and some waterfront land uses for commercial use, it helped prevent the Northern Waterfront from being overly privatized and emphasized the public as an important stakeholder.

While the port got more attention and pressure from the local stakeholders after being transferred to the city, it was also involved in a continuous deteriorating fiscal predicament. On the one hand, this is due to the successful development of containerization and the port’s inability to participate. In 1974, the port lost its most important tenant, American President Lines, which left a sizeable fiscal gap. On the other hand, as commercial development projects were often viewed as hostile to the public’s interest and short-sighted to the planning department, it was difficult for the port to generate revenue in this way with very limited allowances in regulations and planning policies.

Therefore, despite the seemingly irresistible tendency of a changing role, the substantial redevelopment of the northern waterfront underwent rather lengthy progressions with various frictions. Different stakeholders participated in the decision-making process with suggestions, queries, and oppositions, which rendered the redevelopment in such a situation that for almost 20 years, no drastic changes were materialized for the Northern Waterfront. Progress was only made little by little, mainly through planning policy and regulation documents changes.

- A Leap

While the port’s new position in the government rendered those bold projects with massive structures impossible, the urging desire to redevelop the northern waterfront gradually promoted some public-oriented changes more gently. Being assessed as an essential heritage to the city’s identity, fishing-related activities were encouraged in the Fisherman’s Wharf area. The development of tourism spawned recreation-oriented businesses in the neighborhood, which gradually transformed the previous food manufacturing area into an active space for

¹⁶ Port of San Francisco, “Port of San Francisco - History”, [sfgov.org](http://www.sfgov.org), https://web.archive.org/web/20070903162440/http://www.sfgov.org/site/port_page.asp?id=31784

¹⁷ Rubin, *A Negotiated Landscape: The Transformation of San Francisco's Waterfront Since 1950*, 146

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 147-148

production and consumption. However, during the 1980s, the development of the Pier 45 reached some extent of deadlock. The local activists and officials resisted the port's intention to develop hotel and luxury housing projects. Its long-standing financing problem hindered the suggestion to promote it as a working fishing port. This impasse was not solved until an earthquake attacked the city, which cracked a gap for some new opportunities to shine into.

In 1989, the Loma Prieta earthquake struck San Francisco heavily. The devastating seismic force destroyed many fish processing facilities at the Pier 45 and the Embarcadero Freeway, providing an unintended opportunity for replanning, upgrading, and reconstruction. The destruction of Pier 45's foundation and facilities enabled the port to raise sufficient state and federal funds to reconstruct and upgrade the whole site, revitalizing the Fisherman's Wharf as not solely a tourist attraction but also a hub that could accommodate an authentic fishing industry with "processors, wholesalers, and distributors."¹⁹

Additionally, as mentioned in the first part of this chapter, the Embarcadero Freeway (Fig 3) physically impaired the accessibility of the waterfront around the Ferry Building neighborhood and essentially blocked the city's view corridor to the water landscape as well. The earthquake "precipitated the removal of the elevated Embarcadero Freeway" and rendered the area "a new civic edge" that joined the city and the Bay again.²⁰ As a result of a multiagency effort, the new Embarcadero boulevard combines an essential right-of-way with bicycle lanes, pedestrian promenades along the shore, and other landscaping improvements. A generous plaza was also constructed in front of the Ferry Building, embracing the crowds streaming from the city center.

In 1991, the Waterfront Planning Advisory Board (WPAB) was formulated with 27 members recommended by a broad spectrum of stakeholders. With varieties of backgrounds, this team coordinated to produce the *Waterfront Land Use Plan*, later adopted by the Port Commission in 1997.²¹ Since this planning process engaged representatives from different parts of the public sphere, it negotiated well with all kinds of land-use policies. Various documents from other agencies absorbed the plan through amendments, such as the *General Plan* from the planning department and the *Special Area Plan* by BCDC.²² One significant change from this coordination is the allowance of profit-making projects as long as they can support other public needs. The renovated Ferry Building exemplified how this change helped promote the waterfront developments and benefit different groups of actors. It accommodates a generous market space on the ground floor, offices on other layers, and transit services. The mix-use of this building helps it balance well to both generate profits and support the rehabilitation of its historical features.

¹⁹ Rubin, *A Negotiated Landscape: The Transformation of San Francisco's Waterfront Since 1950*, 227-28

²⁰ Sharon Johnston, Mark Lee, and Craig Hartman, eds. *San Francisco: Urban Transformations*. A U, 571. Tokyo: A U Publishing Co, 2018. p8

²¹ San Francisco Planning Department, "Northeastern Waterfront Area Plan", [sfplanning.org, https://generalplan.sfplanning.org/NE_Waterfront.htm](https://generalplan.sfplanning.org/NE_Waterfront.htm)

²² Rubin, *A Negotiated Landscape: The Transformation of San Francisco's Waterfront Since 1950*, 255-256

Therefore, despite the slow progress with struggles in the middle of the 20s century, the resistance that the port encountered along the way prevented its development from excessive privatization and helped establish the present Northern Waterfront as an interactive civic space.

III. Western Addition: Persistence and Changes

In this chapter, we shift our focus to an area that is entirely under the city's jurisdiction, the Western Addition. The urban redevelopment of this area was propelled by a different spectrum of forces, which engendered somewhat passive results as an admonitory lesson for later planners and decision-makers.

- From Survivor to Ruins

Early in 1906, the city was battered by a violent earthquake with a magnitude of 7.9. This sequential urban disaster was followed by several spreading fires, tearing the city into ruins. Surprisingly, the Western Addition “was the most central neighborhood to have survived.”²³ The Victorian-style wooden structures that prevailed in this area somehow withstood the seismic force. However, when strolling in Western Addition nowadays, one may find the decorative row houses styled with bay windows barely preserved, apart from *Painted Ladies*, the iconic Victorian homes on the Steiner St & Hayes St. The absence of this historic feature is mainly attributed to the controversial implementation of the urban renewal project that started since the 1950s, which devastated the dynamic living environment of this neighborhood.

The urban renewal project of Western Addition was not initiated out of any particular interest in this area specifically. Instead, it was more under the influence of a broader vision to revitalize multiple stagnant neighborhoods. After WWII, many American cities saw housing shortages and depression in many old neighborhoods. The post-war environment also favored commercial developments that could boost the economy. These two factors reasonably catalyzed the promotion of the urban renewal idea, which could potentially solve the shortage and stimulate investments. Under this circumstance, the urban renewal was firstly assisted through the legislation process. In 1945, the California Community Redevelopment Act was enacted, allowing municipalities to establish redevelopment agencies (RDAs). These agencies were empowered to purchase or use eminent domain to acquire lands with public funding and private investment.²⁴

²³ Rebecca Solnit, “The Ruins of Memory”. In *After the Ruins, 1906 and 2006: Rephotographing the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire*, 24

²⁴ Thompson Walter. “How Urban Renewal Destroyed the Fillmore In Order to Save It”. Hoodline. Jan 03, 2016 <https://hoodline.com/2016/01/how-urban-renewal-destroyed-the-fillmore-in-order-to-save-it/>

After this process, detailed plans began to take shape in San Francisco, and Western Addition became one of the targeted areas. In a report published by the San Francisco City Planning Commission, the author Mel Scott evaluates Western Addition as a “blight” and stated that:

The new San Francisco, planned for better living, replaces the dilapidation and disorder of more than half a century The indiscriminate mixture of commercial, industrial, and residential structures that is the disease of blighted areas is nowhere to be seen.²⁵

Scott being the planner hired by the city, his suggestion towards Western Addition reflects the arrogance and ignorance of the urban planning back then. As a result, the Board of Supervisors established the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (SFRA) after the Western Addition was designated for redevelopment in 1948.²⁶ SFRA played a leading role in formulating and executing the urban renewal project for this area. In 1956, the Agency published the redevelopment plan of the Western Addition A-1 area, aiming to rehabilitate the withered neighborhood that surrounds the intersection of the Geary and Fillmore streets. The program introduced public improvements and restructured the land-use portion with more public buildings and fewer residences.²⁷ Later in 1959, the director of SFRA, Justin Herman, initiated bulldozing.

By the time the bulldozers fell silent, 883 businesses had been closed, 20,000 to 30,000 residents displaced, and 2,500 Victorian houses demolished. Most of the displaced people left the neighborhood for good.²⁸

This eradication of Western Addition’s previous urban settings presents how human-led force could be deeply engaged in drastically shaping San Francisco's urban development. A neighborhood that once survived such devastating seismic force was later subverted thoroughly by radical planning decisions.

- Problematic Views and Implementation

Although this urban renewal project was carried out with good intentions, the de facto dramatic clearance and improper sequential arrangements revealed the biased stance that the authority took back then. In the late 1940s, the post-war demand for shipyard workers boosted the migration of African Americans into the city. Due to the discriminatory housing policy and economic considerations, they gravitated to Western Addition. Under the influence of these

²⁵ Mel Scott, and San Francisco (Calif.). City Planning Commission. *New City: San Francisco Redeveloped*. San Francisco: San Francisco City Planning Commission, 1947, p5

²⁶ Gary Kamiya, “The Haunted House”. In *Cool Gray City of Love: 49 Views of San Francisco*. 1st U.S. edition. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.

²⁷ For details, see the original document, San Francisco Redevelopment Agency. *The Redevelopment Plan for the Western Addition Approved Development Project Area A-1*. San Francisco, Calif.: Agency, 1956.

²⁸ Kamiya, “The Haunted House”.

new residents, Fillmore Street flourished with “theatres, dance halls, and music clubs”²⁹, which incubated a lively jazz culture within this neighborhood. Therefore, before the renewal movement, Western Addition possessed a racially diverse community with vibrant activities. Western Addition was indeed burdened with shabby housing, high unemployment, and crime, but the planners’ vision to impose renewal through bulldozing completely neglected its values as a living neighborhood.

In 1967, a group of local activists and community leaders founded the Western Addition Community Organization, endeavoring to save the neighborhood from being completely erased. As they filed a lawsuit against the Agency’s activities successfully, a change in federal law happened:

By 1970, the U.S. Congress eventually passed the Uniform Relocation Act, which set the stage for more orderly and open redevelopment activities and provided for an increase in relocation benefits for residents, property owners, and businesses.³⁰

Although the legal victory helped delay the redevelopment process, WACO eventually could not terminate the renewal project. The limited and delayed construction of new housing and higher costs made it difficult for previous residents to move back before the community fell into pieces. In 1974, five years after its opening, Minnie’s Can-Do Club got closed as “the last of the great Fillmore clubs.”³¹ The once lively streets became vapid.

- Efforts In Vain

As the city’s blind optimism to improve the lively neighborhood precipitated an opposite result, the city intended to make some amends. However, not all the efforts engendered ideal improvements. In 1995, SFRA created the Historic Fillmore Jazz Preservation District in Fillmore.³² The jazz-oriented restaurants and clubs launched under this designation failed to sustain themselves in the long run.

Additionally, the spatial changes in the urban setting also toughen the resurrection of the area. One of the primary changes in the redevelopment of the Western Addition A-1 area is the literally “groundbreaking” construction of the Geary Expressway. (Fig 7) The level change of this sunken expressway broke the convenient connection between the two sides of the previous Geary Boulevard. Although Fillmore Street spans over the Expressway and remains continuous, this single bond is too weak to retain the coalescence of the neighborhood between the two sides. (Fig 8,9)

²⁹ Solnit, “The Ruins of Memory”. In *After the Ruins, 1906 and 2006: Rephotographing the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire*, 24

³⁰ Office of Community Investment and Infrastructure, “Western Addition A-1”. [sfocii.org](https://sfocii.org/western-addition-1)
<https://sfocii.org/western-addition-1>

³¹ Kamiya, “The Haunted House”.

³² Ibid.

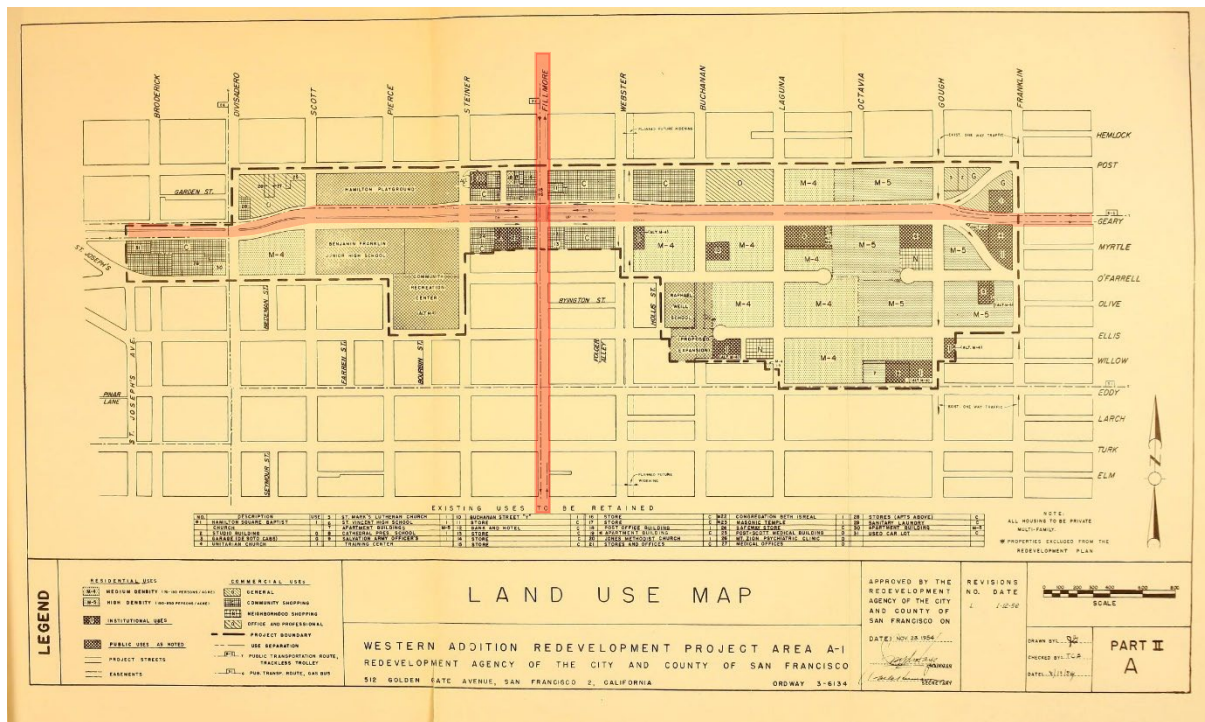


Fig 7. The Land use map of Western Addition A-1, from *The Redevelopment Plan for the Western Addition Approved Development Project Area A-1*. San Francisco, Calif.: Agency, 1956. The Proposed Geary Expressway with widened lanes traverses the neighborhood horizontally, whereas Fillmore Street runs vertically. (marked red by author)



Fig 8. The Fillmore-Gear intersection in 1946. Photo by David Johnson

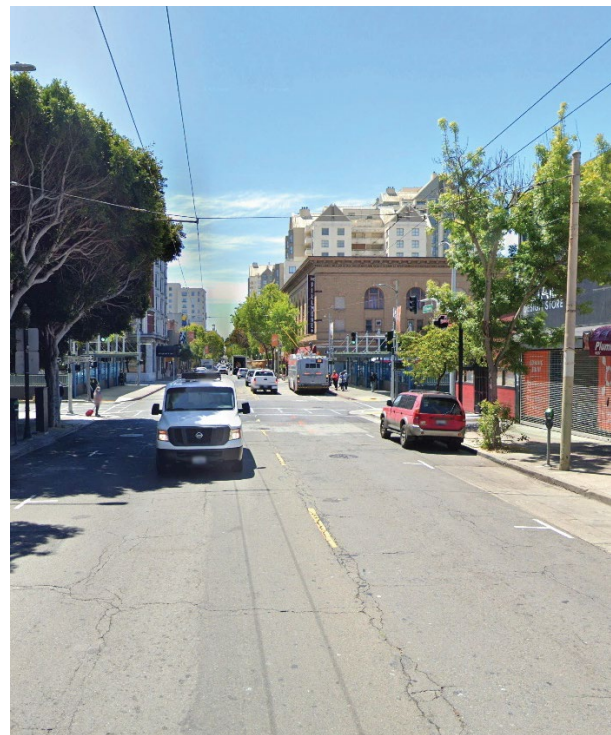


Fig 9. The Fillmore-Gear intersection Nowadays. Google Street

The once-flourishing district with retails and clubs has now become vapid.

IV. Comparison and Conclusion

Under different clashes of forces, the urban transformations of these two areas reveal somewhat polarized paths. The redevelopment of the Northern Waterfront experienced multiple rounds of negotiation with cautiousness, resulting in “a movement away from privatization and towards the creation of a more democratized space”³³. Conversely, the destiny of Western Addition was taken into a chokehold in the first place by biased evaluations and radical movements, which rendered some subsequent remedies almost useless.

However, the contrast between the two does not indicate a dichotomy in urban redevelopment strategy. It is not about a simple choice between conservativeness versus radicalness. When examining the contentions involved in these two cases, the extent of the disagreement is significantly different. Throughout the whole process of the waterfront redevelopment, confrontations between various stakeholders persisted, while in the case of the Western Addition, this sort of contention was frequently absent. This contrast can be attributed to several factors.

- Jurisdictional Disparity

In the case of the Waterfront, the long-lasting friction was partially derived from the different visions held by the port and the city’s planning department. Although the State transferred the jurisdiction of the waterfront back to the city early in 1968, this return was accompanied by the foundation of the Port Commission, which means that there is always a group of people endeavoring to protect the interests of the port from being impaired. As for the Western Addition, it has always been a district under the jurisdiction of the City and County of San Francisco, subject to the zoning code and land-use policy stipulated by the planning department.

In brief, the port’s unique position within the city’s administrative body has helped shelter it from imprudent planning decisions, but the decision-making process was also prolonged with diminished efficiency. And this specific position stems from its previously separate jurisdiction as a state agency.

- Minority, Majority, and Empowered Agencies

The public’s attention to these two places also varied with striking contrast, reflecting some controversial opinions regarding heritage evaluation and preservation. The Northern Waterfront epitomizes the early maritime-related flourishing of this city, and therefore, its historical values are widely recognized by the Franciscans as part of the city’s identity. Embedded in the landscape as an intermediary element that bonds the city and the waterbody, the port is cherished by the citizens. When the port underwent redevelopment, civic attention gravitated toward its progress, forming a larger group of stakeholders actively participating in the planning process. To restrict fill and excessive privatization, legislative attempts were

³³ Rubin, *A Negotiated Landscape: The Transformation of San Francisco's Waterfront Since 1950*, 261

promoted. The creation of BCDC enabled a local group to exert influence and “have their concerns formalized in policy and regulation”.³⁴

In contrast, the Western Addition was evaluated as a “blight” at that time. Its precious cultural and community values were ignored by the patronizing visions of urban renewal. The stakeholder group was limited to the residents, mostly tenants instead of landlords. During this pre-Civil Rights era, this group mainly consisted of African Americans, and they barely had adequate political resources to raise effective opposition at that time.³⁵

- The Urban Land Under Forces

Since the 1950s, the built environment of San Francisco has undergone consistent transformations based on the need for redevelopment. This need was first engendered by multiple top-down forces such as economic pushes and technology innovations. Then bottom-up forces like local agencies and activists emerged as repercussions, thus forming the lengthy process filled with contentions and negotiations. In this process, planning played an intermediary role. It absorbed these forces and formalized them into zoning regulations and land-use policies. These rules, in return, dictate the allowable range of developments, which perform as another type of force.

Any side’s absence from this process may result in some imprudent transformations and undermine the spirit of a neighborhood. Therefore, it is vital to recognize the disadvantaged groups and render them channels to speak out. On the other side, when larger groups of stakeholders are involved, a lack of coordination can generate significant redundancy in decision-making and hinder development. Therefore, the role of the coordinator to mediate different groups is essential to ensure efficiency in making progressions. And this might be the lesson we can extract from these two contrasting cases of urban transformation.

³⁴ Rubin, *A Negotiated Landscape: The Transformation of San Francisco's Waterfront Since 1950*, 148

³⁵ Thompson, “How Urban Renewal Destroyed the Fillmore in Order to Save It”.

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Images

Figure 1, By author

Figure 2, By Eddy, William M.; Higgins, Sylvester W.; Graham, C. (Curtis) -

<https://www.loc.gov/item/76695583/>, Public Domain,

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=69914391>

Figure 3, <https://www.lib.berkeley.edu/EART/maps/sf-1960.html>

Figure 4, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2010/12/san-francisco-the-embarcadero-freeway.html>

Figure 5, [https://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Produce Market](https://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Produce_Market)

Figure 6, Google Map

Figure 7, The Land use map of Western Addition A-1, from *The Redevelopment Plan for the Western Addition Approved Development Project Area A-1*. San Francisco. Calif.: Agency, 1956.

<https://archive.org/details/redevelopmentpla1195sanf/page/n25/mode/2up?view=theater>

Figure 8, By David Johnson, The Fillmore-Post intersection in 1946. Photo featured in *A Dream Begun So Long Ago*.

Figure 9, Shot from Google Streets