

San Francisco, California

Anti-highway and neighborhood movements checked the untrammelled growth of downtown in the decades after WWII and more democratically accountable planning was then introduced. Bicycle, open space, and healthy city planning emerged, along with estuary and stream restoration. The Golden Gate National Recreation Area became a model urban park incorporating civic environmental approaches. Youth became engaged through a formal Youth Commission, as well as other youth development initiatives. Sustainability planning was introduced in the 1990s. The city, of course, has many challenges, not the least of which is economic inequality, housing prices, and homelessness.

Background

- *form of government:* mayor/council (board of supervisors) in consolidated City and County of San Francisco
- *population:* 881,549 residents as of 2019; roughly half white, one-third Asian, one-sixth Latino or Hispanic, and six percent African American
- *geography and land area:* approximately 47 square miles on the SF peninsula in the larger San Francisco Bay Area comprised of nine counties

Postwar urban struggles

Intense conflict occurred over land use, freeway planning, and the “Manhattanization” of downtown to transform the city into the “Wall Street of the West.”

- *highway revolts:* neighborhood resistance to the planning of freeways cutting across the city was intense, persistent, and largely successful (1956-1966).

References:

Katherine M. Johnson, “Captain Blake versus the Highwaymen: Or, How San Francisco Won the Highway Revolt,” *Journal of Planning History* 8 (2009): 56-83.

William Issel, “Land Values, Human Values, and the Preservation of the City’s Treasured Appearance: Environmentalism, Politics, and the San Francisco Freeway Revolt,” *Pacific Historical Review* 68 (1999): 611-646.

- *downtown development:* civic mobilization against the size and placement of large buildings, the uses of the waterfront, the displacement of retired mariners from South of Market area, the transformation of Black, Latino, and Chinese neighborhoods, and other issues. By the early 1970s, various forms of “urban environmentalism” had emerged.

Over time, information workers and other largely white collar jobs would be further drawn to the city and help to transform it on a postindustrial basis. Citizens across the city, including some prominent activists, union leaders, and black workers, were very supportive of the economic and aesthetic transformation of the skyline that ensued, at least in these early years.

However, some influential voices in architecture and allied professional fields began to generate alternatives for enhanced civic engagement, critical design journalism, and retaining public ownership of renewal land.

References:

Jasper Rubin, *[A Negotiated Landscape: The Transformation of San Francisco's Waterfront since 1950](#)* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011).

Alison Isenberg, *[Designing San Francisco: Art, Land, and Urban Renewal in the City by the Bay](#)* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

Tomás F. Summers Sandoval, *[Latinos at the Golden Gate: Creating Community and Identity in San Francisco](#)* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

Eduardo Contreras, *[Latinos in the Liberal City: Politics and Protest in San Francisco](#)* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

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Chester Hartman, with Sarah Carnochan, *[City for Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco](#)*, revised and updated edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

John H. Mollenkopf, *[The Contested City](#)* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

Patrick J. O'Hern, "Reclaiming the Urban Environment: The San Francisco Urban Design Plan," *Ecology Law Quarterly* 3 (1973): 535-595.

Stephen L. Vettel, "San Francisco's Downtown Plan: Environmental and Urban Design Values in Central Business District Regulation," *Ecology Law Quarterly* 12 (1985): 511-566.

- *accountable planning*: after a series of failed ballot initiatives and lawsuits to control growth in the 1970s and 1980s, Proposition M passed in 1986 as an "accountable planning initiative" that began to shift urban regime dynamics.

References:

Richard Edward DeLeon, *Left Coast City: Progressive Politics in San Francisco, 1975-1991* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992).

Stephen J. McGovern, *The Politics of Downtown Development: Dynamic Political Cultures in San Francisco and Washington, D.C.* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998).

Sue Hestor, “San Francisco’s Leading Slow Growth Advocate: Sue Hestor,” interview, Parts One and Two, by Arthur Bruzzone (SFUnscriptedTV, May 2011).

Marcia Rosen and Wendy Sullivan, “From Urban Renewal and Displacement to Economic Inclusion: San Francisco Affordable Housing Policy 1978-2014,” *Stanford Law & Policy Review* 25 (2014): 121-162.

Estuary protection and restoration

As geographer Richard Walker has argued, “Saving the bay was one of the first mass, popular mobilizations on behalf of the natural environment, here or anywhere in the world” (110-111). It began in the 1960s and reversed a century of unchecked degradation by engaging a broad array of conservation groups in collaborative action over a watershed area of some 60,000 square miles.

- [Save the Bay](#): Save San Francisco Bay Association (now Save the Bay) was founded in 1961 and is a member of [Restore America's Estuaries](#), the major national network of estuary groups.

With strategic leadership of Save the Bay, collaborative networks have served as the foundation for an ambitious sea-level rise initiative, institutionalized through a new San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority, as Bay voters in nine counties agreed in 2016 to a parcel tax that will fund \$25 million per year for twenty years for shoreline remediation and wetland restoration. The first allocation for eight projects was approved in early 2018.

The San Francisco Estuary Project became part of the National Estuary Program (NEP) in 1993.

- [California Coastal Conservancy](#): the major nonregulatory government agency and partner in restoration efforts, established in 1976. Provides grants for restoration efforts, including those focused on climate resilience and environmental health justice. It was relatively under-financed for its first two decades (due to tax revolts), but then citizens voted substantial bond measures. As of 2020, the coastal conservancy has funded 2,400 projects and provided \$1.3 billion, while leveraging far more from federal and local government and private sources.

References:

Save the Bay, [2020 Strategic Plan](#) (2017): includes estuary and wetland habitat restoration, Bay Smart communities with green infrastructure standards, climate adaptation and resilience, as well as to galvanize public engagement and build strategic partnerships.

Richard A. Walker, [The Country in the City: The Greening of the San Francisco Bay Area](#) (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), chapter 5.

David Vogel, [California Greenin'](#): *How the Golden State Became an Environmental Leader* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018).

Steven Lewis Yaffee, [Beyond Polarization: Public Process and the Unlikely Story of California's Marine Protected Areas](#) (Washington: Island Press, 2020).

Judith E. Innes and David E. Booher, [Planning with Complexity: An Introduction to Collaborative Rationality for Public Policy](#), 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018), with some cases on water planning from the Bay Area.

John Hart and David Sanger, [San Francisco Bay: Portrait of an Estuary](#) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

U.S. EPA, [Community-Based Watershed Management: Lessons from the National Estuary Program](#) (Washington, DC: U.S. EPA, Office of Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds, 2005).

Christopher K. Ansell, "Community Embeddedness and Collaborative Governance in the San Francisco Bay Area Environmental Movement," in Mario Diani and Doug McAdam, eds., [Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action](#) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 123-144.

Kay Kerr, Sylvia McLaughlin, and Esther Gulick, "Save San Francisco Bay Association, 1961-1986" (Berkeley: Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, 1987).

Ann L. Riley, [Restoring Streams in Cities: A Guide for Planners, Policymakers, and Citizens](#) (Washington: Island Press, 1998).

Ann L. Riley, [Restored Urban Streams: Case Studies in Science and Practice](#) (Washington: Island Press, 2015).

Bicycle planning and advocacy

A robust bicycle movement emerges, especially from the 1990s onwards, with significant impacts on transportation planning. The radical tactics of Critical Mass give way to more relational and collaborative approaches.

- [San Francisco Bicycle Coalition](#): founded in 1971, but only develops organizational and political capacity in the 1990s, as it responds to political opportunities and broadens its membership, including more women, children, families, and diverse communities. Increasing stress on “transportation justice” in recent years. SFBC [Strategic Plan 2018-2022](#).

While SFBC focuses on effective advocacy and leadership development, staff and volunteers have also done extensive one-on-one relational work with professional staff at the municipal transportation agency, as well as with the planning, health, and environmental departments, to build trust and to ensure effective knowledge sharing and smooth implementation.

Its success in the early 2000s led to a broader coalition, now call [Livable City](#), which focuses on “complete neighborhoods,” with biking, walking, public transit, and other goals, including more affordable housing.

References:

Jason Henderson, [Street Fight: The Struggle over Urban Mobility in San Francisco](#) (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), chapter 5.

Nicole Foletta and Jason Henderson, [Low Car\(bon\) Communities: Inspiring Car-Free and Car-Lite Urban Futures](#) (New York: Routledge, 2016), chapter 4, provides an in-depth case study of Market and Octavia neighborhood (along with innovative cases from Europe).

John G. Stehlin, [Cyclescapes of the Unequal City: Bicycle Infrastructure and Uneven Development](#) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), chapter 4, provides a critical case study of Valencia Street in the Mission District and dynamics of gentrification.

Carmen Sirianni, [Sustainable Cities in American Democracy: From Postwar Urbanism to a Civic Green New Deal](#) (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2020), chapter 4, on San Francisco and the larger bicycle movement and policyscape.

Healthy city planning

The San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) has engaged in “healthy city” partnerships with a wide array of community and nonprofit groups. In the process, it has helped to rethink environmental health politics as the collaborative work of planners, health professionals, civic groups, and residents, especially those in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Healthy city planning seeks to integrate various other aspects of planning and urban sustainability, such as bicycle and pedestrian routes, open space, affordable and green housing, community policing, and food access, as well as environmental justice.

It thus fosters an approach to healthy urban governance as substantive content, as well as institutional and civic process, in which the coproduction of expertise is key. Visioning and valuing exercises within agencies, and with communities, help drive institutional culture change.

For instance, the Eastern Neighborhoods Community Health Impact Assessment (ENCHIA) process engaged a coalition of 25 community groups within the neighborhood, as well as 40 other interest groups and private organizations across the Bay area, to generate a vision of a healthy city, along with a health impact assessment tool that could be utilized in other neighborhoods. The deliberative process remained rooted in the social meanings of a healthy place.

Groups included neighborhood associations, the San Francisco Bicycle Association, local union, food alliance, family resource center, youth group, neighborhood parks council, community land trust, neighborhood design center, plus a half dozen or so city agencies (public health, police, redevelopment, parking and traffic, planning, recreation and parks).

As a result of the networks engaged in this process, policy diffusion occurred in other parts of the metropolitan region, as well as in several major institutions funding and advocating community-based approaches.

References:

Jason Corburn, *Toward the Healthy City: People, Places, and the Politics of Urban Planning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009).

Jason Corburn, “Civic Innovation, Deliberation, and Health Impact Assessment: Democratic Planning and Civic Engagement in San Francisco,” in Jennifer Girouard and Carmen Sirianni, eds., *Varieties of Civic Innovation: Deliberative, Collaborative, Network, and Narrative Approaches* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2014), 45-74.

Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA)

Established in 1972 as part of the National Park Service (NPS), GGNRA has developed into a model of a “civic environmental” urban park.

This was enabled by the Citizen Advisory Committee that accompanied the original legislation, which became an effective deliberative forum and broker among contending groups. Seeking to set a national standard for NPS and other agencies, park planners such as Doug Nadeau convened some four hundred initial meetings and workshops.

These helped to generate a framework for increasingly diverse and inclusive collaborative governance among park managers, landscape architects, and civic and user groups that has paid many dividends in the decades since.

Persistent tensions between public use and natural resource protection have been mitigated by engaging the public directly in stewardship and restoration, including formal partnerships with the San Francisco Unified School District Environmental Science Center, the San Francisco Conservation Corps, the Marine Mammal Center, the Headlands Center for the Arts, and dozens of other centers and institutions housed in GGNRA's 1,231 historic structures (many decommissioned military installations).

References:

Hal K. Rothman, [*The New Urban Park: Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Civic Environmentalism*](#) (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

Amy Meyer, with Randolph Delahanty, [*New Guardians of the Golden Gate: How America Got a Great National Park*](#) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

Timothy Beatley, [*Handbook of Biophilic City Planning and Design*](#) (Washington: Island Press, 2016), 103-118, for other urban parks and park planning in the city.

Doug Nadeau interview, by John Martini (San Francisco: Presidio Oral History Project, 1998).

Open space planning

A movement for open space, smart growth, and regional planning emerged in the 1950s from civic and environmental activists, as well as planning students and professors at UC Berkeley. Various open space districts were established around the Bay area, with habitat conservation as an increasingly important concern. Land trusts have become especially important, often under the auspices of The Nature Conservancy or the Trust for Public Land.

- [Greenbelt Alliance](#): founded in 1958 (with two name changes since then), the alliance worked to prevent further landfill and development of the San Francisco Bay. Focus on climate-smart development, resilient communities and design, in face of sea-level rise.

[Bay Area Greenprint](#): a toolkit developed by Greenbelt Alliance, The Nature Conservancy, American Farmland Trust, Bay Area Open Space Council, and Greeninfo Network. Contains spatial, conservation, and climate data on protected lands, local government policies. For use by community stakeholders, planners, conservation stakeholders.

- [The Conservation Lands Network 2.0: A Regional Conservation Strategy for the San Francisco Bay Area](#) (Berkeley, CA: Bay Area Open Space Council, 2019). Comprised of major land trusts, public agencies, and academic scientists, this strategy sets a goal of conserving 2.5 million acres of priority lands by 2050, including wildlife habitat, streams, wetlands, ponds; manage for permeability, health and resilience; engage stewards to maintain ecological and hydrological processes. Stewardship Focus Team. Climate

resilience goals. “Science-based” and “smart conservation investment” oriented. However, not targeted to urban areas as such.

References:

Richard A. Walker, *[The Country in the City: The Greening of the San Francisco Bay Area](#)* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), chapters 6-7.

Daniel Press, *[Saving Open Space: The Politics of Local Preservation in California](#)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

Sustainable food district

San Francisco has become the hub of a regional food district that brings together local restaurants (such as Chez Panisse), organic growers, and civic and government land preservation actors (ranchers, park preservation advocates, land trusts, Cooperative Extension, a watershed council), into an increasingly thick set of institutional relationships, with “food democracy” and “food justice” as emerging values. Oakland, in the East Bay, is also increasingly part of this hub.

Institutional purchasers, such as school districts and hospitals, have also become important actors in the network.

References:

Sally Fairfax, Louise Nelson Dyble, Greig Tor Guthey, Lauren Gwin, Monica Moore, and Jennifer Sokolove, *[California Cuisine and Just Food](#)* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012).

Youth development and engagement

[San Francisco Youth Commission](#), created in 1995 as revision of city charter; and many other youth development and engagement nonprofits. Collaboration with Department of Children, Youth, and Their Families.

References:

Milbrey McLaughlin, W. Richard Scott, Sarah Deschenes, Kathryn Hopkins, and Anne Newman, *[Between Movement and Establishment: Organizations Advocating for Youth](#)* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

Carmen Sirianni and Diana A. Schor, “City Government as Enabler of Youth Civic Engagement: Policy Designs and Implications,” in James Youniss and Peter Levine, eds., *[Policies for Youth Civic Engagement](#)* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009), 121-163.

Sustainability and climate planning

The city published its first sustainability plan in 1996 and its first climate action plan in 2004. Five community panels provided feedback for the 2013 update.

References:

City and County of San Francisco, Department of the Environment, [San Francisco Climate Action Strategy Update](#) (2013).

City and County of San Francisco, Department of the Environment, [Strategic Plan 2016-2020](#).

City and County of San Francisco, [Resilient San Francisco: Stronger Today, Stronger Tomorrow](#) (2016), with support from 100 Resilient Cities. Building strong, healthy, connected and engaged neighborhoods is a key component of the plan, along with partnerships with public agencies. Build capacity at the neighborhood level; utilize community asset mapping (see assets-based community development or ABCD in [CivicGreen](#) Glossary).

Karen Chapple, [Planning Sustainable Cities and Regions: Towards More Equitable Development](#) (New York: Routledge, 2015).

Peter Berg, Beryl Magilavy, and Seth Zuckerman, *Green City Program for San Francisco Bay Area Cities and Towns* (San Francisco: Planet Drum Foundation, 1989).

Beryl Magilavy, *Indicators Applications: Moving Indicators into Action – San Francisco’s Experience 1988-1998* (Sustainable City, 1998).

For some further reading on San Francisco, see:

Marcia Rosen and Wendy Sullivan, “From Urban Renewal and Displacement to Economic Inclusion: San Francisco Affordable Housing Policy 1978-2014,” *Stanford Law & Policy Review* 25 (2014): 121-162.

Randy Shaw, [Generation Priced Out: Who Gets to Live in the New Urban America](#) (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

Amy L. Howard, [More Than Shelter: Activism and Community in San Francisco Public Housing](#) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

Elizabeth A. Armstrong, [Forging Gay Identities: Organizing Sexuality in San Francisco, 1950-1994](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

Els De Graauw, [Making Immigrant Rights Real: Nonprofits and the Politics of Integration in San Francisco](#) (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016).

Michael Storper, Thomas Kemeny, Naji Makarem, and Taner Osman, *[The Rise and Fall of Urban Economies: Lessons from San Francisco and Los Angeles](#)* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Business Books, 2015).

Christopher Lowen Agee, *[The Streets of San Francisco: Policing and the Creation of a Cosmopolitan Liberal Politics, 1950-1972](#)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

Randy Shaw, *[The Tenderloin: Sex, Crime, and Resistance in the Heart of San Francisco](#)* (Urban Reality Press, 2015).

Allan B. Jacobs, *[Making City Planning Work](#)* (Chicago: American Planning Association, 1980).

Frederick M. Wirt, *[Power in the City: Decision Making in San Francisco](#)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

Stephanie S. Pincetl, *[Transforming California: A Political History of Land Use and Development](#)* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

Isaac William Martin, *[The Permanent Tax Revolt: How the Property Tax Transformed American Politics](#)* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

Cary McClelland, *[Silicon City: San Francisco in the Long Shadow of the Valley](#)* (New York: Norton, 2018).

Nan Alamilla Boyd, *[Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965](#)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

Ralph M. Kramer, *[Participation of the Poor: Comparative Community Case Studies in the War on Poverty](#)* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969).

Bruce Brugmann and Greggar Sletteland, eds., *[The Ultimate Highrise: San Francisco's Mad Rush Toward the Sky](#)* (San Francisco: Bay Guardian Books, 1971).

Manuel Castells, *[The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements](#)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

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