Date: March 4, 2020

To: Recreation and Parks Commission  
   Capital Committee

Through: Philip A. Ginsburg, General Manager  
         Toks Ajike, Director of Capital & Planning Division

From: Lauren Dietrich Chavez, Project Manager

Subject: Buchanan Street Mall – Conceptual Design

Agenda Item Wording

Discussion and possible action to approve a conceptual design for park renovation of the full Buchanan Street Mall, spanning five blocks between Eddy and Grove Streets. Approval of this proposed action by the Commission is the Approval Action as defined by S.F. Administrative Code Chapter 31. This conceptual design will guide future capital investment as funding becomes available.

Strategic Plan

**Strategy 1—Inspire Public Space:** Keep today’s parks safe, clean, and fun; promote our parks’ historic and cultural heritage; and build the great parks of tomorrow
   - Objective: 1.2: Strengthen the quality of existing Parks & Facilities
   - Objective: 1.4: Preserve and celebrate historic and cultural resources

**Strategy 2—Inspire Play:** Promote active living, well-being and community for San Francisco’s diverse and growing population
   - Objective 2.2: Strengthen and promote the safety, health and well-being of San Francisco’s youth and seniors
   - Objective 2.3: Work with partners and neighborhood groups to activate parks through organized events, activities, and unstructured play

**Strategy 3—Inspire Investment:** Through community engagement, advocacy, and partnerships, cultivate more financial resources to keep San Francisco’s parks and programs accessible for all
   - Objective 3.3: Cultivate increased philanthropic support
Background Information

The Buchanan Street Mall is in the Western Addition, within District 5. The park spans the full width of Buchanan, between Grove and Eddy Streets, with three full blocks in the middle and half-blocks on the north and south ends. The Park space is segmented by the cross streets of McAllister, Golden Gate, and Turk, and is bordered by public housing developments and several community institutions: Rosa Parks Senior Center, Ella Hill Hutch Community Center, and the African American Arts & Culture Complex. Buchanan Street Mall was built by the Redevelopment Agency, opened to the public in 1975, and transferred to RPD management in 1976. The park underwent major renovations in the late 80s/early 90s and received repairs in the early 2000s.

A robust community process for reimagining the five blocks of park space began in 2014. Temporary activations were installed in 2015 in partnership with Citizen Film, Green Streets, The Trust for Public Land (TPL), and the Exploratorium’s Studio for Public Spaces, and included trough gardens, audio domes, and gateways. TPL published a Vision Plan for Buchanan Street Mall in 2017. Conceptual design for the full five blocks began in earnest in November 2018, with a high caliber landscape design partnership through the Office of Cheryl Barton and Studio-MLA, funded by TPL.

Through the Let’sPlaySF! Initiative, a partnership between with the Recreation and Park Department and the San Francisco Parks Alliance, the children’s play area within the Turk-Golden Gate block of Buchanan Street Mall was identified as a Tier 2 project for renovation. Confirmed funding for the project is largely for the Let’sPlaySF! renovation of the playground in the Turk – Golden Gate block. The intent of this conceptual design is to guide future capital investment across Buchanan Street Mall.

Proposed Design

The conceptual design process looked at the Buchanan Street Mall as a whole, as requested by the community. The park property holds both good memories—from early park days with regular barbecues, kids play, and community activation—and traumatic ones—including turf wars and gun violence; and the space has been thought as unsafe and notably underutilized in recent decades. The community-led public engagement process over the last five years has been a healing process, and improvements to the park are envisioned as a much large process of repair to the connective tissue of the neighborhood. Through storytelling, events, and community participation in designing and maintaining the temporary activation elements, the neighbors are moving across the mall more, interacting more, and feeling hopeful for the benefits of imminent capital investment.

The 2017 Vision Plan identified the following community goals for park renovations:

- Connecting all blocks;
- Social exchange, engagement, and interaction;
- Gardens; and
- Play and recreation.
In support of these goals, the conceptual design includes the following elements:

- A memory walk that extends throughout all five blocks of Buchanan Mall, incorporating art and interpretive elements to tell the stories of the neighborhood;
- New pedestrian lighting, to encourage walking through the space;
- Several micro-enterprise kiosks adjacent to gathering areas, to be activated by local businesses for recreational purposes;
- A flexible plaza for gathering and small classes or events, as well as a stage for larger performance events;
- Several picnic areas and barbecues;
- A full basketball court, and a half court that could be used for multi-sports;
- New planted areas, including communal gardens with clustered seating for conversation and contemplation; and
- New play areas for young and school age children, and an adjacent adult fitness court to encourage inter-generational play.

**Community Engagement**

The community in the Western Addition has been heavily involved throughout the Buchanan Mall visioning and planning process and there is widespread support for capital investment per the conceptual design. Citizen Film and Green Streets are core community partners who launched The Buchanan Change Team and have driven much of the outreach and re-visioning efforts in recent years. TPL supported and was an active participant in community engagement, bringing their expertise at creating parks and protecting land for people, and providing essential project management. Below is a summary of engagement highlights from the 2015-17 visioning process.

- Over 20 community events were hosted on the Buchanan Street Mall, utilizing the temporary activation elements.
- Three community design workshops were held where community members:
  - Talked about childhood memories and built models of their favorite places;
  - Selected photos, wrote what values the photos represented, and placed the photos on a map of the Mall; and
  - Provided feedback on a functional diagram that TPL and the Exploratorium had created based on community input from the first two workshops.
- Two reflection sessions were held in coordination with the community design workshops, where community members talked about violence prevention and safety concerns, the importance of community presence on the mall in order to keep kids safe, and how the temporary activation installations have catalyzed positive change.
- Over 430 individuals were surveyed about the Community Vision Plan.
- Resources were dedicated to supporting local youth in sharing their vision, hosting events, and interviewing local elders. Some of those youth leaders are still actively involved today.
- Twelve documentary videos were created, highlighting the stories of the past and hope for the future, organizations that are providing community benefit and inspiration, and youth perspectives on Buchanan Street Mall.
Extensive outreach was done during the planning phase over the past year and community input on desired park uses and improvements drove development of the conceptual design. In brief, community engagement with the conceptual design process started in late 2018 and included:

- 71 community members participated in two design workshops/community meetings;
- 55 community members participated in two design presentations;
- RPD, Green Streets, Citizen Film, O|CB, and/or TPL tabled at six community events;
- Over 1150 surveys were conducted; and
- The final conceptual design was shared at three community events.

**Project Funding and Schedule**

**Confirmed Funding**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Fund</td>
<td>$1,270,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Let’sPlaySF!</td>
<td>$ 835,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Impact Fees</td>
<td>$ 515,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust for Public Land (in-kind project management, community outreach, planning, and design services through conceptual design)</td>
<td>$ 232,000</td>
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</tbody>
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All but $345,000 of this confirmed funding is expressly dedicated to the Let’sPlaySF! renovation of the playground in the Turk – Golden Gate block.

**Environmental Review**

The project has been reviewed by the Planning Department and a Categorical Exemption (Case Number 2020-001049ENV) under Class 1 – Existing Facilities and Class 4 – Minor Alterations to Land was received on February 7, 2020.

**Staff Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the Commission approve the conceptual design for park renovation of the full Buchanan Street Mall, spanning five blocks between Eddy and Grove Streets, to guide future capital investment as funding becomes available.

**Supported By**

RPD Staff  
Citizen Film  
Green Streets  
Supervisor Dean Preston  
The Trust for Public Land

**Opposed By**

None known
Attachments

Attachment A  Conceptual Design Package, February 25, 2020
Attachment B  CEQA Categorical Exemption Determination, November 15, 2019
Attachment C  Letters of Support