



London Breed, Mayor  
Philip A. Ginsburg, General Manager

**Date:** January 20, 2022

**To:** Recreation and Parks Commission

**Through:** Philip A. Ginsburg, General Manager  
Stacy Bradley, Acting Director of Capital & Planning Division

**From:** Cara Ruppert, Project Manager

**Subject:** Portsmouth Square – Adoption of CEQA Findings and Concept Plan

---

### **Agenda Wording**

Discussion and possible action to adopt CEQA findings for the Portsmouth Square Improvement Project; to adopt findings of consistency with San Francisco General Plan and priority policies of San Francisco Planning code section 101.1; and to approve a concept design for the Portsmouth Square Improvement Project. Approval of this proposed action by the Commission is the Approval Action as defined by S.F. Administrative Code Chapter 31.

### **Strategic Plan**

#### **Strategy 1 Inspire Place**

Objective 1.1 Develop more open space and improve access to existing facilities to address population growth in high-needs and emerging neighborhoods.

Objective 1.1.i Implement the newly approved \$239 million bond funds for park development and renovation.

Objective 1.4 Preserve and celebrate historic and cultural resources

Objective 1.4.b Require interpretive signage as part of all capital project sites with historic, cultural, or natural resources.

Objective 1.4.d Develop strategies to recognize and celebrate Native American culture and history on SF parkland.

#### **Strategy 4 Inspire Stewardship**

Objective 4.1 Conserve and strengthen natural resources

Objective 4.1.d Scope San Francisco's first carbon-neutral facility.

### **Project Background**

Portsmouth Square is located in the Chinatown neighborhood at 733 Kearny Street, between Clay Street and Washington Street, and is one of San Francisco's most significant historic, cultural, and civic spaces. The existing terraced site includes several hardscape plazas, two children's play areas, a clubhouse, underground parking structure, various historical markers, a new restroom building, and a pedestrian bridge extending over Kearny Street.



The proposed project will demolish nearly all the existing park features, with the exception of the upper-level restrooms, the parking garage, and its associated facilities. The proposed project will renovate the existing park with a new children's play area, exercise equipment, plazas, shade structures, seating areas, wayfinding, signage, sidewalks, landscaping, terraces, ramps, and a new 8,300-square-foot clubhouse. The proposed project will also re-waterproof the roof of the Portsmouth Square Garage located underneath the park and portions of the adjacent streets and sidewalks, seismically upgrade portions of the parking garage, and demolish and remove the pedestrian bridge spanning Kearny Street that connects a 27-story hotel building at 750 Kearny Street (currently managed as a Hilton Hotel and the Chinese Culture Center) with Portsmouth Square. The construction duration of the proposed project is anticipated to be approximately two years.

At the outset of the outreach and conceptual design phase, five project goals were identified:

1. The project site shall be viewed in the context of the overall Chinatown Neighborhood: the renovated park and streetscape should seamlessly integrate with the community context and reflect the needs of the Chinatown neighborhood.
2. Provide an integrated and open park that maximizes usable space, removes barriers, and gracefully connects to the surrounding neighborhood.
3. Provide a safe pedestrian experience.
4. Create spaces that are comfortable, safe, and welcoming for all age groups and abilities.
5. Create flexible spaces that can accommodate daily recreation activities as well as events.

### **Community Outreach**

The Recreation and Park Department conducted a comprehensive community and stakeholder outreach process over multiple years. Every outreach connection point was conducted in both English and Cantonese, both in written documents and verbal communication. The community engagement was divided into two phases: 1) Listening, and 2) Participatory Design. The following describes the outreach conducted during these phases:

#### **Phase 1: Listening (2016)**

- One-on-One Stakeholder Interviews with key community members, advocates, and stakeholders: The project team spoke to individuals representing over 20 community organizations.
- Intercept Surveys: on-the-ground conversations with park users while they were in the park.
- Online Survey

Through this initial listening phase, the project team reached over 500 individuals for initial information about the park.

#### **Phase 2: Participatory Design (2017-2018)**

- Community Workshop #1: The project team shared a summary of the results from Phase 1 and provided an opportunity for community members to contribute their opinions in the same format. In addition, the team began the participatory design process by sharing site constraints, analysis, and history. A survey to understand community program and visual preference was conducted to understand community priorities.

- Community Workshop #2: The project team presented potential design “frameworks” for input. These frameworks were diagrammatic massing studies representing options for organizing the site.
- Community Workshop #3: Three alternative designs were presented based on feedback from the listening phase and earlier workshops.
- Community Workshop #4: Preferred Option presented for feedback.
- Community Workshop #5: Final concept plan presented.

The community workshops witnessed the Recreation and Park Department’s highest community attendance to date and a corresponding high level of engagement and survey responses. This is a highly engaged and organized community that is passionate about their open spaces and invested in the future of Portsmouth Square.

The proposed design includes the following community identified priorities:

- Provide a larger, flexible outdoor event space
- Provide a stage with power to support events
- Provide a new larger clubhouse
- Include new lighting to enable evening use & improve safety
- Provide generous shade structures
- Provide trees for shade
- Include a new, larger, consolidated playground
- Provide fitness equipment for seniors near the playground
- Remove the existing Kearny Street bridge
- Include perimeter fencing so park can be secured at night
- Enhance the connection to Walter U. Lum Place
- Enhance universal accessibility



### **Proposed Design**

The conceptual design resulted from the community outreach, is reflective of the cultural significance of the neighborhood, and addresses programmatic challenges unique to Chinatown. It responds to the existing conditions of the site – most prominently, the garage structure below the park and the natural topography of the site. These two constraints naturally split the park into two terraces, the upper and lower terrace. They also provide a clear organizational structure for the clubhouse design.

The organizing concept for the proposed park is inspired by a traditional Chinese treasure box, where the compartment is perfectly scaled for the content. Since Portsmouth Square is so heavily used, scaling and framing the outdoor rooms is key for program success. Activity and program preferences were solicited from the community in intercept surveys and at workshop 1. The community was invited to test-fit site program elements into park frameworks in workshop 2. The final design showcases a park proportioned and scaled to maximize the key outdoor programmatic spaces, while also utilizing the zones between the spaces.



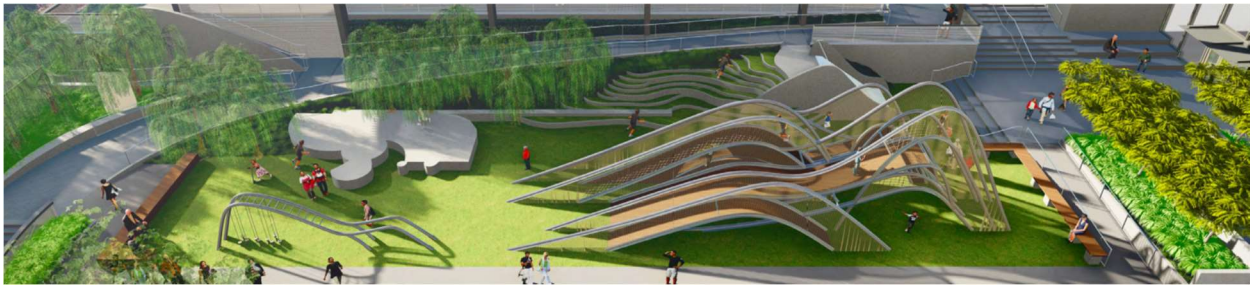
### Upper Plaza:

The primary feature on the upper level will be a new enlarged plaza and event space. The plaza includes a raised stage on the west side of the plaza, as well as a large shade structure at the eastern edge. The large plaza will have an overhead catenary light system that further defines the space and creates a safe and inviting place for evening use. This level also includes the entry court at the northwest corner, the clubhouse terrace, new planters, and landscaping.



### Lower Level:

A ramp and staircase connect the two levels of the park. The lower level of the redesigned park includes a large children's play area and adult fitness area. The playground features a new custom play element, terraced steps, and a grand slide. The existing concrete play sculptures and benches that represent animals of the Chinese zodiac will be reinstalled in the new play area. To the north of the play area is a small plaza that allows for an indoor-outdoor connection to the clubhouse. The lower plaza connects to Kearny Street through stairs and an accessible ramp.



### Security and Connectivity:

The proposed design creates a single cohesive park by removing the existing barriers and elements that divide spaces. This improves security by allowing for direct lines of sight across the park. The entire property will feature a fence and gate system that provides transparency while maximizing security in the park. New lighting and security cameras will foster additional security. The park and clubhouse will also provide free Wi-Fi service to the public.

Art, Monuments, and Plaques: Within the existing park, multiple statues, monuments, and plaques were found to be historically significant. In addition, the Goddess of Democracy statue is culturally significant to the community. The proposed project will relocate all these elements within the new park. In addition, the San Francisco Arts Commission will refurbish all the existing art elements and provide a new art feature.



Clubhouse: The new two-story 8,300 square foot clubhouse will be located on the northeast corner of the site and is designed to be a lantern on this corner. It will span both the upper and lower levels and is composed of multiple community spaces with direct connections to the park at both levels. The new clubhouse is designed to provide flexible spaces for a variety of activities, such as seated assemblies, workshops, or performances.

On the lower level, the main feature is a large multipurpose community room: a double-height, 4,000-square-foot space that can accommodate up to 500 people. On the mezzanine, two smaller meeting rooms are planned with a removable partition wall to allow for flexible sizes and spaces. In addition, a kitchenette, offices, restrooms, multiple storage areas, and utility spaces are carefully located throughout the clubhouse. An internal elevator provides access to both floors.

The north, south, and east façades of the new clubhouse will be glazed to provide visibility to the upper and lower terraces from within, as well as to the adjacent streets. The existing garage elevators on the upper level will remain, and the new clubhouse would be constructed around the existing elevators.



#### Sustainability Features:

The new Portsmouth Square clubhouse is designed as RPD's first zero-carbon building: a building that produces zero carbon emissions. RPD will achieve this through electricity generated via solar panels on the roof in combination with purchasing all renewable energy from the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission. Other sustainability features include low-energy use LED light fixtures, high-insulating window glazing, and energy monitoring to reduce energy use.

#### Historic & Interpretive Program

Permanent interpretive elements and displays will be installed at the property that highlight the history of Portsmouth Square and its historic features. It will also celebrate the Chinese American residents and the rise of influence and political power that was associated with the construction of the Kearny Street Bridge.

### Cultural Identity in the Proposed Design:

The park design reflects community feedback, and in particular, the culture and values of the local Chinese community heard during the engagement process. The community was a co-designer for the project and provided critical input on the design features – both broadly and in the details. The design and styling of the park reflect the current culture and values of the local Chinese community.

The design of the park is inspired by a traditional Chinese treasure box. The upper-level trellis incorporates traditional curved roofs, and the lower-level playground sculptural element is influenced by the idea of the "Gold Mountain," a title for San Francisco given by early Chinese immigrants who arrived during California's Gold Rush era. The steps leading to the slide on the lower-level playground will be terraced in a manner that evokes the memories of early Chinese immigrants of their homeland and its terraced/contoured agricultural fields.

The park's over-scaled Penjing planters will feature collections of oriental pines, flowering magnolias, and Chinese Fringe specimen trees. Additionally, that landscaping species' seasonal flowering will coincide with annual Lunar New Year celebrations.

The proposed clubhouse is designed as a symbolic lantern for the community, reminiscent of the Chinese lanterns of Chinatown. The building glazing resembles Chinese screens, and the roof lines evoke traditional Chinese architecture.

### Environmental Review

The Project Sponsor filed an Environmental Evaluation Application for the Project with the San Francisco Planning Department on September 12, 2018.

Pursuant and in accordance with the requirements of Section 21094 of CEQA and Sections 15063 and 15082 of the CEQA Guidelines, the Planning Department, as lead agency, published and circulated a Notice of Preparation ("NOP") on September 23, 2020, which solicited comments regarding the scope of the Environmental Impact Report ("EIR") for the proposed project. The NOP and its 30-day public review comment period were advertised in a newspaper of general circulation in San Francisco and mailed to governmental agencies, organizations, and persons interested in the potential impacts of the proposed project.

During the 30-day public scoping period that ended on October 23, 2020, the Planning Department accepted comments from agencies and interested parties that identified environmental issues that should be addressed in the EIR. Comments received during the scoping process were considered in the preparation of the Draft EIR (the "DEIR").

The Planning Department prepared the DEIR, which describes the project's potential physical environmental impacts, identifies mitigation measures for impacts found to be significant or potentially significant, and evaluates alternatives to the proposed project. The Planning Department published the DEIR on August 4, 2021 and provided notice as required by law.

The Planning Commission held a public hearing on September 9, 2021 to solicit comments on the adequacy and accuracy of the DEIR. The Department also received written comments on the DEIR, which were accepted until September 20, 2021.

The Planning Department then assembled the Comments and prepared a Responses to Comments document (the “RTC”). The RTC includes copies of all the comments received on the DEIR and written responses to each comment. It was published on December 29, 2021.

In addition to describing and analyzing the physical and environmental impacts of the revisions to the Project, the RTC document provides additional, updated information, clarification and modifications in response to issues raised by commenters, as well as Planning Department staff-initiated text changes to the DEIR.

The Final EIR (<https://sfplanning.org/environmental-review-documents>), which includes the DEIR, the RTC, and Appendices to the DEIR and RTC, and all of the supporting information, has been reviewed and considered. The RTC and appendices and all supporting information do not add significant new information to the DEIR that would individually or collectively constitute significant new information within the meaning of Public Resources Code Section 21092.1 or CEQA Guidelines Section 15088.5, so it does not require recirculation of the Final.

On January 13, 2022, the Planning Commission reviewed and considered the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the Project and found that the contents of the report and the procedures through which the FEIR was prepared, publicized and reviewed complied with the California Environmental Quality Act (Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.), the CEQA Guidelines (14 Cal. Code Reg. Section 15000 et seq.), and Chapter 31 of the San Francisco Administrative Code.

The Planning Commission found the FEIR was adequate, accurate and objective, reflected the independent analysis and judgement of the Planning Department and the Planning Commission, and that the summary of comments and responses contained no significant revisions to the DEIR, and certified the Final EIR for the Project in compliance with CEQA, the CEQA Guidelines and Chapter 31.

The Planning Commission, in certifying the FEIR, found that the Project and/or the variants described in the FEIR will have the following significant and unavoidable environmental impacts:

- **Historic Architectural Resources:** The proposed project would demolish the existing pedestrian bridge spanning Kearny Street. The removal of the bridge would result in the loss of the historically significant physical connection between Chinatown and the Chinese Culture Center and the hotel at 750 Kearny Street provided by the pedestrian bridge. The project would also result in a significant and unavoidable impact through demolition of this architecturally significant Brutalist pedestrian bridge structure that was designed by two master architects and represents a rare property type in San Francisco.

The Planning Commission has reviewed the entire record of this proceeding, the Environmental Findings regarding the alternatives, mitigation measures, and environmental impacts analyzed in the FEIR, all of which was made available to the public.

The EIR identified mitigation measures to reduce identified environmental impacts with regard to historic architectural resources, cultural resources, tribal cultural resources and noise. With regard to Historic Architectural Resources mitigation measures included, 1) A public interpretive program including oral history, 2) A plan for removal, relocation, storage, and reinstallation of all plaques and monuments, 3) Documentation of historical resources, 4) A salvage plan. With regard to Cultural Resources, mitigation measures include 1) Archeological and Native American monitoring. With regard to Tribal Cultural Resources, a mitigation measure included a tribal cultural resources preservation plan and interpretive program. With regard to Noise, a mitigation measure included construction noise control. The EIR found that despite the imposition of all feasible mitigation measures, the significant and unavoidable impacts to historic architectural resources will remain significant and unavoidable.

The Recreation and Park Commission is being asked to adopt CEQA Findings, including a Statement of Overriding Considerations for the significant unavoidable historic resource impacts of the project, and a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) as part of its approval of the proposed Project. (See Attachment B for these documents.)

**Sources & Uses of Funding**

Sources

2020 Health & Recovery Bond	\$54,000,000
Transit Center Impact Fees & CFD Revenue	\$10,865,000
Sustainable Chinatown Grant	\$8,400
Downtown Park Fund (Pending)	\$500,000
Bond Project Balances (Pending)	\$626,600
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$66,000,000</b>

Uses

Soft Costs	\$13,800,000
Hard Costs	\$51,200,000
Project Reserve	\$1,000,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$66,000,000</b>

**Schedule**

Design	Current – March 2022
Permitting	March 2022 – December 2022
Bid & Award	November 2022 – February 2023
Construction	March 2023 – March 2025
Closeout	April 2025 – September 2025

**Staff Recommendation**

Staff recommends the Recreation and Park Commission adopt CEQA findings for the Portsmouth Square Improvement Project; to adopt findings of consistency with San Francisco General Plan and priority policies of San Francisco Planning code section 101.1; and to approve a concept design for the Portsmouth Square Improvement Project. Approval of this proposed action by the Commission is the Approval Action as defined by S.F. Administrative Code Chapter 31.



**Supported By**

- Supervisor Peskin and District 3 Office
- Chinatown Community Development Center (CCDC)
- Committee for Better Parks & Rec in Chinatown (CBPRC)
- Self-Help for the Elderly
- Community Youth Center (CYC)
- Allan Low, former Recreation & Park Commissioner
- Cindy Wu, former Planning Commission President
- Gordon Chin, former Recreation & Park Commissioner
- Rosa Chen, Parks, Recreation, Open Space Advisory Committee
- Community Tenants Association
- Chinatown SRO Families United
- Rose Pak Democratic Club
- Manilatown Heritage Foundation
- Chinese Culture Center
- Ping Yuen Residential Improvement Association

**Opposed By**

None

**Attachments:**

Attachment A: Concept Plan

Attachment B: CEQA Findings, including the Statement of Overriding Considerations and a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP)

Attachment C: San Francisco Planning Department Findings of Consistency