Date: September 21, 2023

To: Recreation and Parks Commission
   Capital Committee

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

From: Lauren Dietrich Chavez, Project Manager

Subject: Buchanan Street Mall – Memory Walk Status Update

Agenda Item Wording

Presentation and discussion only, regarding a status update on the Buchanan Street Mall Memory Walk, which includes decorative paving and interpretive elements along all five blocks of the park and serves as a platform for future art opportunities. (Information only)

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 Supervisorial District 5. The park spans the full width of Buchanan Street, 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, low-income, and cooperative housing developments and anchor community institutions: Rosa Parks Senior Center, Ella Hill Hutch Community Center, and the African American Arts & Culture Complex. The Redevelopment Agency built Buchanan Street Mall and it opened to the public in 1975. Management transferred to Recreation and Parks in 1976. The park underwent major renovations in the late 80s/early 90s and received repairs in the early 2000s. Buchanan Street Mall sits within an Environmental Justice Community, and the immediate vicinity has some of the highest concentrations in the City of children, single-parent households, and households without internet access.

In 2014, a robust community process for reimagining the five blocks of park space began. In 2015, a collaborative partnership with Citizen Film, Green Streets, The Trust for Public Land (TPL), and the Exploratorium’s Studio for Public Spaces installed temporary activations including 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. San Francisco Public Works completed the conceptual design for the park, and it was approved by the Recreation and Parks Commission in April 2020. The concept plan provided an essential story on why funding was vital, while also helping to guide future capital investment for the community.

Through the Let’sPlaySF! Initiative, a partnership between 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, and received $1,900,000 in seed funding in 2014. With the support of key partners and city, state, and federal funding, Recreation and Parks has secured over $25 million for this project, allowing the department to move forward and renovate program areas on all five blocks of Buchanan Street Mall. The department continues to seek funding to deliver the community’s full vision for the Memory Walk and three park activation kiosks, planned for the middle three blocks.

In 2022, Recreation and Parks launched a Park Improvement Equity Action Initiative, after hearing directly from the Fillmore Community and key partner organizations on the importance of public investments translating to a park project that is meaningful to the community. That means we are focusing on strengthening the neighborhood, creating equitable economic opportunity, and improving health and wellness for everyone in the Western Addition. This PIEA Initiative will ensure that the Buchanan Street Mall Renovation project is a community driven process that centers the rich culture, legacy, and identity of the neighborhood.
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 nine years has been a healing process, and improvements to the park are a key component of a much larger process of repair to the connective tissue of the neighborhood. Through storytelling, events, and community participation in designing and maintaining the temporary activation elements, and pilot park activation kiosk, the neighbors are moving across the mall more, interacting more, and feeling hopeful for the benefits of imminent capital investment.

The Vision and Design of Buchanan Street Mall Renovations

The 2017 Vision Plan identified the following community goals for park renovations, which were further refined in the project conceptual design in 2020:

1. Safety, Lighting & Beautification
2. Connect Blocks & Unify the Community
3. Tell the Story of the Community & the Neighborhood
4. Social Interaction & Multi-Generational Recreation
5. Skills Training & Jobs Creation
6. Urban Greening & Stormwater Management

The design of The Mall builds on the community-driven vision in the concept plan, and further articulates circulation, connectivity, programming, and spatial relationships. The design honors the community’s goal of having a safe place to gather, garden, recreate, and celebrate. Repeated elements throughout The Mall include seat walls, fixed and swinging benches, picnic and cafe tables, barbeque and picnic areas, raised planters, pedestrian and ambient lighting, rain gardens and other stormwater detention features, and a palette of predominantly native planting. The renovated park will also include a host of new program areas: a multi-sport half-court, a new 2-5yr childrens’ play area, a new 5-12yr childrens’ play area that flows into a senior and adult exercise area, a full basketball court with two striped pickleball courts, a stage with storage, a raked grass lawn, two picnic and BBQ areas, and three communal garden areas.

The Memory Walk

The Memory Walk is envisioned as a well-lit and accessible walkway that weaves through Buchanan Street Mall, connecting all the blocks, creating a safe passage with an Afrocentric design. The Memory Walk will include monumental gateways, special paving, and interpretive elements, and will provide a platform for future community-led art & storytelling opportunities.

The community-driven visioning process 2015-2017 explored West African textile patterns and Adinkra symbols representing memory, strength, and celebration. A second visioning process in 2023 focused on the meaning of “home” in the Western Addition neighborhood, which was represented in the forms and motifs of Victorian architecture lost to the devastating process of urban renewal in the mid-20th century. Subsequent discussions also highlight the importance of
acknowledging significant community members, historical events, and contemporary symbols of Black identity.

The design of the Memory Walk abstracts the motifs of West African and Victorian designs—such as chevrons and diamond patterns, and architectural columns and roof peaks—to unify elements of paving, gateway columns, and gateway fencing throughout The Mall. In the paving this is evident in the textile-like unit paving patterns, interspersed with solid decorative concrete that is accented with embedded community-selected symbols in nickel-bronze. Park entrances at the segmenting cross streets are marked by 12-foot illuminated metal columns featuring waterjet patterns repeated from the adjacent paving, while space at eye level is retained for interpretive or possible artistic content. These column panels may include additional waterjet patterns, interpretive signage, perforation portraits, and/or the original work of local artists. Similarly, space is reserved on the 12-foot decorative metal fence for interpretive or art panels, planned be painted waterjet-cut steel that may feature translucent patterns or perforation portraits. The tall gateway fencing bookends The Mall and flanks a central basketball court, serving both aesthetic and functional purposes.

The Recreation and Park Department is working in collaboration with Trust for Public Land, the African American Arts & Culture Complex, and Citizen Film to mentor emerging artists, frame art opportunities, invite community participation, and engage artists with the artistic and interpretive opportunities throughout the Memory Walk. Parameters for unique art opportunities and plans and a funding strategy for maintenance of Memory Walk artwork will be further developed this fall, and all standalone art opportunities will be approved by the Recreation and Parks Commission before a public request for qualifications is announced. The project team has consulted with the San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC) Public Art Program Director on best practices for a public art process, and will take final concept designs of all original works of art to the SFAC Visual Arts Committee for approval.

Community Engagement

This project has a 9-year history of extensive community engagement, reaching over 650 people with community meetings, receiving over 1,000 survey responses, and touching over 7,000 community members at dozens of events.

Since spring 2022, there have been four community meetings specifically seeking input on Memory Walk themes and design development. Project information was shared at three public community events on Buchanan Street Mall, and a survey was conducted this summer for final feedback in person and online.

Project staff notified the community about the Civic Design Review occurring on September 18, 2023 and the Recreation and Park Commission meeting on September 21, 2023 through the Buchanan Change outreach team. They are distributing the announcement via text alert, social media, and informal conversations. A blog post is up on the Recreation and Parks Department website, and a preview of the presentation will be shared at office hours on September 7, 2023 and September 14, 2023. In addition, emails have been sent to hundreds of local residents,
leadership at community institutions, and property managers for the housing complexes adjacent to Buchanan Mall.

**Project Funding**

**Confirmed Funding**

| Trust for Public Land (cash & in-kind, Prop 68 Statewide Parks Grant; for project management, community engagement, Memory Walk planning and design services, interpretive and art elements, and artist fees) | $ 1,813,350 |

**Pending Funding**

Buchanan Street Mall Memory Walk partners are currently fundraising for additional art opportunities, to deliver (and have resources to maintain) the community’s full vision.

**Project Schedule**

Landscape elements of the Memory Walk (decorative paving and gateway fencing and columns, with associated interpretive and art elements) will be delivered with the Buchanan Street Mall Renovations project:

- **Planning**: November 2014
- **Design**: May 2020
- **Bid & Award**: December 2023
- **Construction**: June 2024
- **Park Re-Open**: July 2025

Buchanan Street Mall Memory Walk partners are currently fundraising for and framing original art opportunities, and the schedule for fabrication and installation is to be determined.

**Environmental Review**

The Memory Walk has long been a key design element of the Buchanan Street Mall Renovations project, and was included in the project description and drawings reviewed by the Planning Department. 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.

**Supported By**

- RPD Staff
- African American Arts & Culture Complex
- Citizen Film
- The Trust for Public Land
Opposed By

None known

Attachments

Attachment A Memory Walk Conceptual Design Package, September 2023