



Art and Interpretive Program Master Plan

Portsmouth Square
21 January 2025



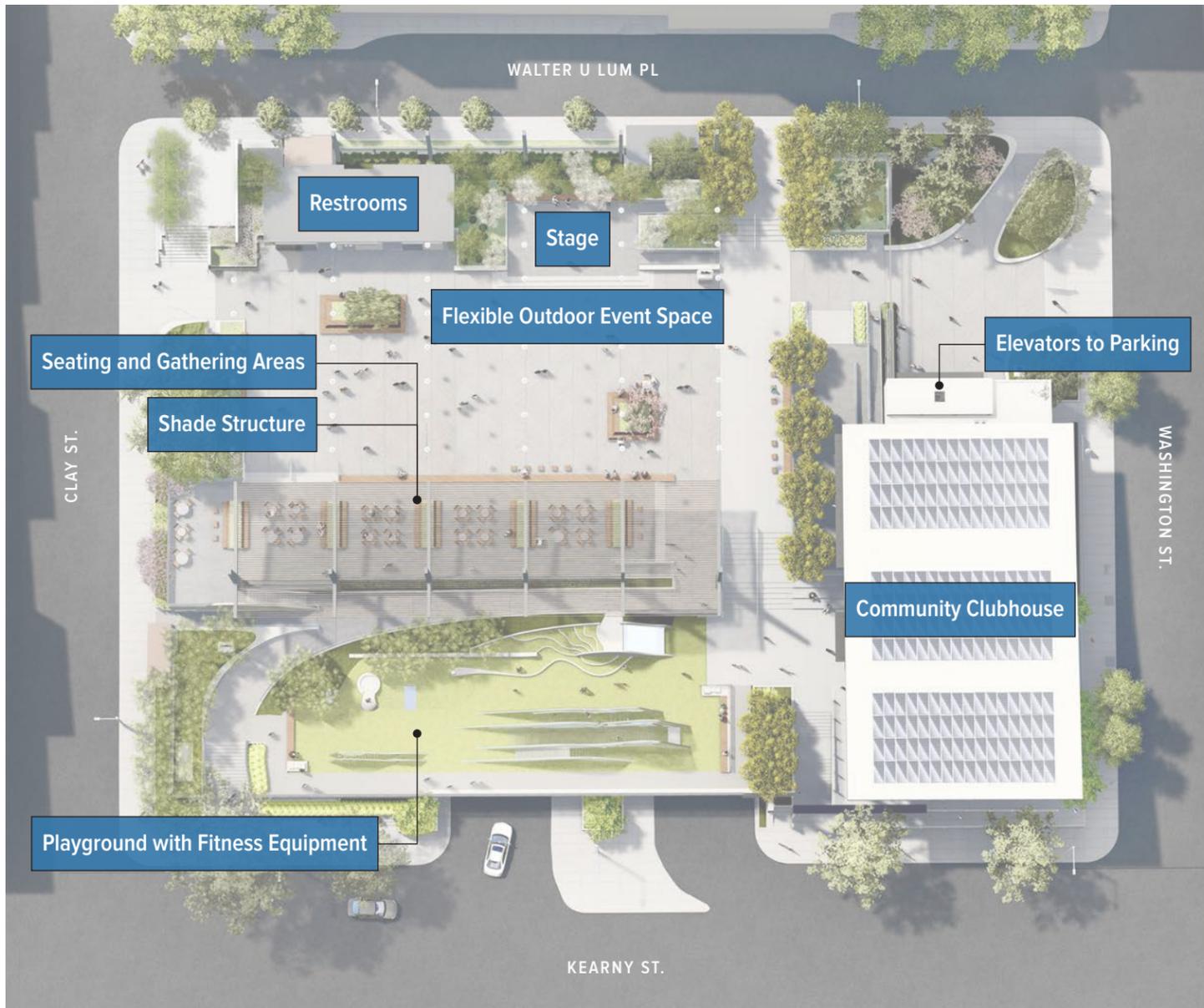
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OVERVIEW

PORTSMOUTH SQUARE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT



Plan view of Portsmouth Square showing features of the Improvement Project.

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 park is eligible for listing in the California Register of Historic Resources for its role as an important cultural space for the Chinatown community and for its association with important events and early development of San Francisco.

The park, located above the Portsmouth Square parking garage, is owned and operated by the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department and will receive a complete renovation with funding from the City's 2020 Health and Recovery Bond. The design is the result of a robust community engagement and participatory design process, is reflective of the significance of the neighborhood, and embraces programmatic challenges unique to Chinatown.

The new park will continue to be the heart of Chinatown, but with improvements that maximize the usable space, remove existing barriers, and better connect to the surrounding neighborhood. The new park and clubhouse facilities will be safe, inviting, and flexible spaces that better accommodate daily recreational activities and events of all sizes.

Features of the project include:

- A large flexible outdoor event space with an elevated stage
- A new larger community clubhouse with a large assembly area and meeting rooms
- A large shade structure
- A new consolidated playground with adult fitness equipment
- The removal of the existing Kearny Street pedestrian bridge
- Perimeter park fencing to allow for night security
- Enhanced accessibility
- New planting, irrigation, lighting, and furnishings
- Generous seating and gathering areas
- Replacement of the garage roof's waterproofing and drainage system
- Adjacent streetscape improvement

For Information on the Portsmouth Square Capital Improvement Project, please visit: <https://sfrecpark.org/1166/Portsmouth-Square>.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT



Ramaytush Ohlone Land Acknowledgement Resolution passed 6/17/21

The San Francisco Recreation and Park Department acknowledges that we occupy the unceded Ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone peoples, who are the original inhabitants of the San Francisco Peninsula. We honor the Ramaytush Ohlone peoples for their enduring commitment to Mother Earth. As the Indigenous protectors of this land and in accordance with their traditions, the Ramaytush Ohlone have never ceded, lost, nor forgotten their responsibilities as the caretakers of this place, as well as for all peoples who reside in their traditional territory. As stewards of park land we recognize our duty to honor the Ohlone through thoughtful and informed preservation and interpretation of ancestral land. As uninvited guests, we affirm their sovereign rights as First Peoples and wish to pay our respects to the Ancestors, Elders and Relatives of the Ramaytush Community.

Originally a civic plaza for the Yerba Buena settlement, the square was renamed after the USS Portsmouth in 1846. Portsmouth Square has served as a backdrop to some of the most important moments in city and state history as well as countless gatherings, organized demonstrations, festivals, parades, and other events of civic and cultural significance.

The park is the **living room** for the diverse community of San Francisco's Chinatown, a neighborhood rich in history, vibrant in contemporary culture, and actively forward-thinking of future generations.



(Top Left) Portsmouth Square, 1866, San Francisco. Published by Lawrence & Houseworth; Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

(Top Right) Old Hall of Justice, 1906, San Francisco. Photography by Willard E. Worden; Published by OpenSFHistory. Image shows old Hall of Justice and Robert Louis Stevenson Monument in April 1906, just before the 1906 Earthquake.

(Bottom) Portsmouth Square, San Francisco. Published by The Cultural Landscape Foundation.

TEAM ROLES

Each of the following city agencies and design firms had a specific role that led to the development of the Interpretive Program Master Plan with input from members and representatives the Chinatown community.



San Francisco Recreation and Parks

The San Francisco Recreation and Park Department's Mission is to provide enriching recreational activities, maintain beautiful parks and preserve the environment for the well-being of everyone in our diverse community.

As the owners and operators of Portsmouth Square, SF Rec Park is honored to be working alongside a dedicated group of stakeholders, community groups, city agencies and design professionals to ensure that the Portsmouth Interpretation and Arts program is aligned with the overall goals and mission of the department.



San Francisco Planning

San Francisco Planning is the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), under whose authority the 2021 Portsmouth Square Improvement Project Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was prepared.

As part of the EIR, mitigation measures were identified, and applied to the Portsmouth Square Improvement Project to reduce significant and unavoidable impacts to the historic resources identified at the park. San Francisco Planning participated in the development of this plan to ensure compliance with the identified mitigation measures. To learn more about CEQA, please visit the [What is CEQA?](#) page on the Planning Department's website.



San Francisco Arts Commission

The San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC) is the City agency that champions the arts as essential to daily life by investing in a vibrant arts community, enlivening the urban environment, and shaping innovative cultural policy.

SFAC will direct and manage the implementation of the two new public art opportunities and facilitate the relocation and maintenance of the existing artworks and monuments under SFAC jurisdiction at Portsmouth Square.



MEI Architects + SWA Group

The Landscape Architectural (SWA) and Architectural (MEI) firms have formed a joint venture to develop a comprehensive renovation and redesign of the park features.

They have been engaged in redesigning the park with the community and their role in the Interpretive Program Master Plan is to ensure the overarching design principles of the park are preserved and strengthened as the interpretive master plan is developed.



WAYFINDING + PLACEMAKING

Clearstory

Clearstory is a design consultant specializing in wayfinding and placemaking—helping people connect to places and stories in the built environment. The responsibility of Clearstory during this phase has been to develop the Interpretive Program Master Plan.

They solicited interpretive stories and themes from the community, synthesized input into programmatic guiding principles, and created a working plan of how and where stories and themes will be physically incorporated into the park.

MITIGATION MEASURES

The Portsmouth Square Improvement Project prompts specific mitigation measures put forth by the San Francisco Planning Department. Mitigation measures identify the way that environmental impacts can be avoided or reduced. Some of the mitigation measures for the Portsmouth Square Improvement Project relate to history and culture and prompt the development of a **public interpretive program**:

- Mitigation Measure M-CR-1a: Public Interpretive Program Including Oral History. This measure requires the development of an interpretive program focused on the history of the project site and its identified historic resources. Key components of the program include coordinating a public art piece that celebrates Chinese American residents of Chinatown and San Francisco, installing permanent on-site interpretive displays in Chinese and English, and the creation of an oral history project with community leaders, park users, and Chinese Culture Center staff or members.
- Mitigation Measure M-TCR-1: Tribal Cultural Resources Preservation Plan and Interpretive Program. This measure requires the development of a Public Interpretation Land Acknowledgement, developed in consultation with local Native American representatives; permitting opportunities for local Native American community events in the redesigned park; and preservation in place of any archeological resources of Native American origin, should any be found during project construction.

Also relevant to the public interpretive program is:

- Mitigation Measure M-CR-1b: Plan for Removal, Relocation, Storage and Reinstallation of All Plaques and Monuments. This measure requires a relocation plan be reviewed and approved by the Planning Department, with the plan identifying the storage location of plaques and monuments, reinstallation locations, and approach for ongoing maintenance.

A complete list of mitigation measures and substantive descriptions of each mitigation measure for the Portsmouth Square Improvement Project can be found in the [Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program \(MMRP\)](#) posted on the Environmental Review Documents page of San Francisco Planning's website.



INTRODUCTION



Input from the community was gathered during public meetings hosted by San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department. Presentation materials and feedback were provided in English and Chinese. Photography by Clearstory.

PROCESS

This master plan will guide the future design process for the interpretive program. It will provide a framework for guiding principles, considerations for existing monuments and art, and specific preferred locations for new interpretation that will be built into the park. It suggests physical design parameters such as: words count, font sizes, imagery, and languages. It includes suggestions for materials based on content volume, location, and durability.

What is interpretive design? Interpretive design gives meaning to historic, cultural, and environmental stories. It helps people connect history and place. A **well-rounded interpretive experience** includes multiple forms spanning from information rich components that educate to poetic gestures that inspire.

The master plan is the culmination of a phase of community input. The following considerations were studied and discussed between 2023 and 2024 during a series of community meetings hosted by San Francisco Recreation and Parks and attended by the public, as well as regular discussions with a panel of community stakeholders including representatives from the Chinatown Arts & Cultural Coalition and Chinese and Asian American experts and scholars.

Also in attendance during these community input meetings were San Francisco Arts Commission, San Francisco Planning, and the design team: SWA Group, MEI Architects, and Clearstory.

Considerations:

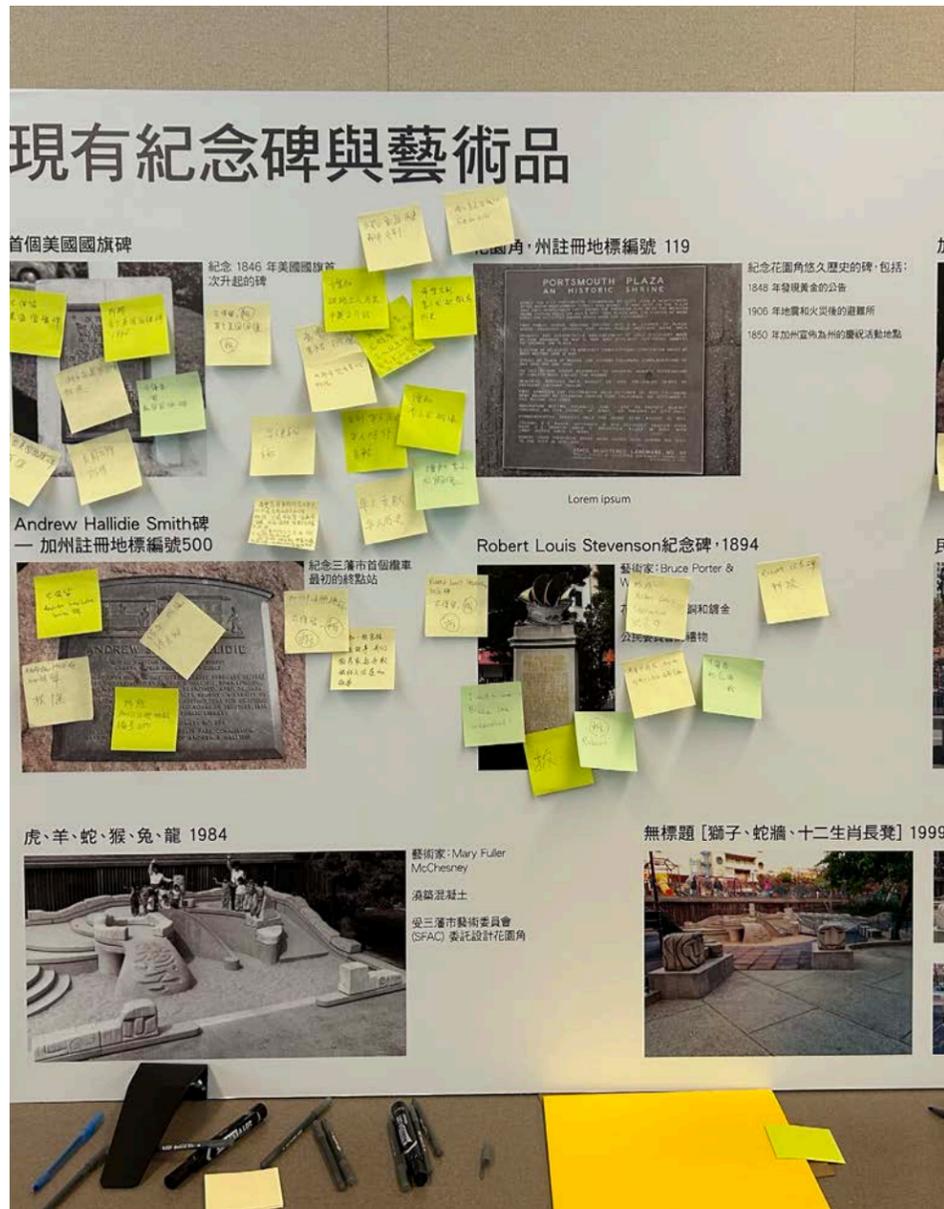
- Removal and relocation of existing monuments and plaques
- Reinterpretation of existing monuments and plaques
- New opportunities for interpretation
- New opportunities for public art

PROCESS

During the phase of community input the Chinatown Arts & Cultural Coalition and its selected panel of community scholars published a document called, Envisioning “Flower Garden Corner” 花園角: The Living Room of Chinatown (Appendix A to this master plan), which is a working statement that shares their vision for a more community responsive development of their neighborhood.

Additionally, a public letter from Chinatown organizations, (Appendix B to this master plan) was sent on October 16, 2023 to San Francisco Recreation and Parks and San Francisco Arts Commission on the subject of keeping Chinese and Asian American art and history centered in the conversation of the Portsmouth Square arts and interpretive program.

Community input, including both documents, significantly informed the principles outlined herein that will guide the arts and interpretive program.



During public meetings, attending community members provided input on opportunities and considerations within Portsmouth Square, leaving comments on presentation boards. Photography by Clearstory.

UNITY TRADITIONS RESPONSIVE EDUCATION **INSPIRE**
 CONNECTIONS PUBLIC **LOCAL** LANDMARK
 DIVERSITY ACTION RECOGNITION THREADS STORYTELLING
 GATHERING **HISTORY** **SITE SPECIFICITY** CONVERSATION
 SERVICE NEIGHBORHOOD RELATIONSHIPS PLACEMAKING
 EMPOWER **COMMUNITY FORTITUDE** IMPACT
 ROOTS CIVIC MEANINGFUL FUTURE LIVING ROOM SAN FRANCISCO
 OUTREACH **EXPERIENCE** **ART & ACTIVISM**
 VISION ENVIRONMENT UNDERSTANDING **LEGACY**
 AWKNOWLEDGMENT ADVOCACY **CULTURE** GUIDANCE SOLIDARITY

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

These principles, guided by community culture and values are the lens through which content and design of the interpretive program will be developed.

- 1. Community fortitude - “Is it for us and by us?”**
 In this question, the “us” is the local Portsmouth community including Asian and Asian American community members, who should be both the author of the interpretive and arts content and a primary audience. The “us” also includes the broader city community due to the long history of the square and other SF communities associated with the square’s history.
- 2. Art & activism - “Does it inspire and call us to actions?”**
 When we tell a story in place we must consider the visitor experience and the legacy that we are building into the environment. The impact of the interpretation should be to impart the ongoing sense of activism that has given life to the Square as the living room of the community in that past and into the future.
- 3. Site specificity - “Is it significantly connected to Portsmouth?”**
 When choosing which ‘threads’ of the rich and wide spanning cultural and historical tapestry to weave into the art and interpretation program at Portsmouth Square the relationship to locality is important. The power of standing where a story takes place is key to an impactful experience.

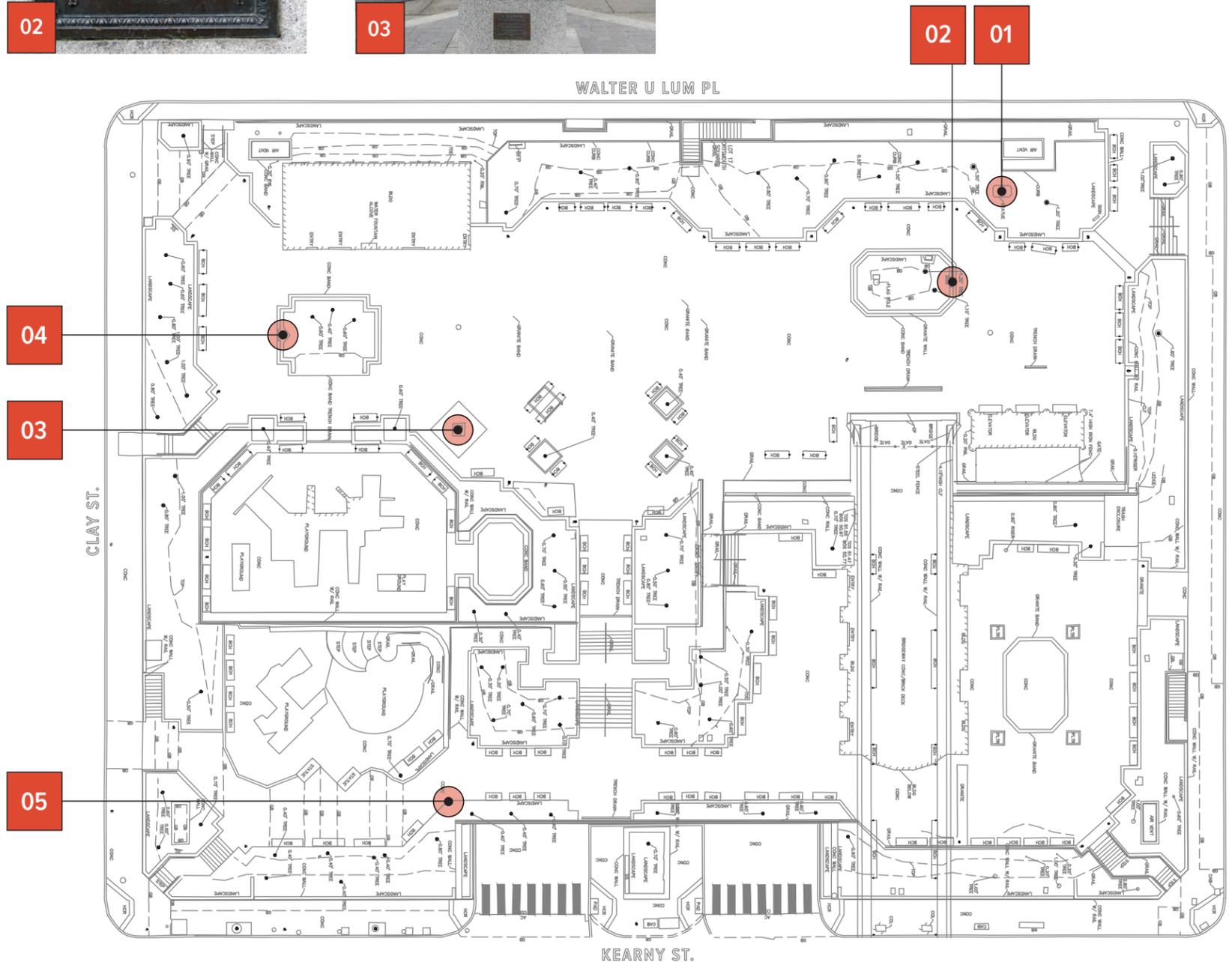
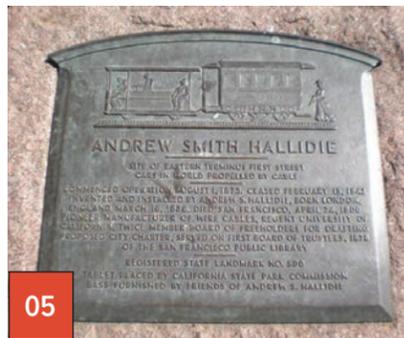
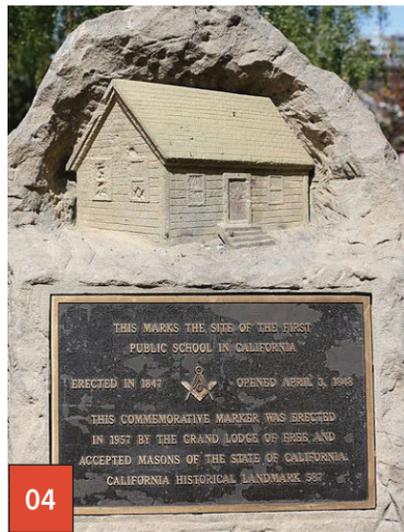


EXISTING MONUMENTS AND ART

REMOVAL AND RELOCATION

Based on community guidance and directly referencing Appendix B, this master plan recommends the removal and relocation of certain existing monuments, plaques, and art that does not represent the holistic legacy of the neighborhood. Others are not recommended for removal.

The purpose of these recommendations is to ensure that the arts and interpretation in the new design for the Square reflects and recenters the histories of communities who call the neighborhood home.



The plan depicts the current placement of monuments and plaques within the existing park plan.

REMOVAL AND RELOCATION



Andrew Hallidie Smith plaque, 2008, Portsmouth Square. Published by Wikimedia Commons.

Andrew Hallidie Smith Plaque

The Andrew Hallidie Smith plaque is recommended for removal from the park and relocation to an undetermined nearby location. The marker commemorates the original terminus of the city's first cable car.

Community Feedback The cable car line was understood by the local community as a means of creating distance between wealthy San Francisco residents and the communities that inhabited Chinatown.

The Planning Department has determined that the plaque can be moved to a nearby location outside of the park and continue to acknowledge the achievement of the cable car. The Planning Department will consult with partner city agencies and local historical groups to reinstall the plaque at an alternate nearby location.

REMOVAL AND RELOCATION

Robert Louis Stevenson Memorial

The Robert Louis Stevenson Memorial is recommended for removal from the park and relocation to a different city park.

Community Feedback The writer commemorated by the monument lived in Chinatown for a short time and visited Portsmouth Square to write while in San Francisco, but did not seem to have an extensive and deep connection with the neighborhood. Upon his death in 1894 funds were raised by a committee to create and install the memorial in 1897 as a gift to the city.

The memorial is in the Civic Art Collection and the process for relocation is managed by the San Francisco Arts Commission, as provided in the [Program's Policies and Guidelines](#).



(Right) The Robert Louis Stevenson statue is placed above a parking garage, 1959, Portsmouth Square. Photography by Bob Campbell; Published by The Chronicle.



(Left) The Robert Louis Stevenson Memorial, 2013, San Francisco. Published by Wikimedia Commons. Bruce Porter. *Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) Memorial*, bronze and gold gilding on granite. 1894. Collection of the City & County of San Francisco, gift of a committee of citizens.

REMOVAL AND RELOCATION



(Right) First American Flag Marker, 1924, Portsmouth Square. Published by the San Francisco Public Library.

(Left) John Montgomery Flag Raising Plaque, 2008, Portsmouth Square. Published by Wikimedia Commons.



First American Flag Marker

The First American Flag marker is recommended for removal from the park. The marker commemorates the first raising of the American Flag in 1846 by Captain Montgomery of the USS Portsmouth. Captain Montgomery was acting as an official of the United States claiming Yerba Buena from the Mexican Government during the United States Intervention in Mexico.

Community Feedback The First American Flag Marker represents colonial legacies that have harmed communities.

The Planning Department and San Francisco Recreation and Park have determined that the plaque can be removed from the park. Planning Department staff, in coordination with the Recreation and Parks Department, will consult with the installers of the plaque, the Daughters of the American Revolution to determine the plaque's new location.

REMOVAL AND RELOCATION



Mary Fuller McChesney Art
The Mary Fuller McChesney Sculptures are not recommended for removal at this time and are planned for relocation within the park.

The artist’s cast concrete pieces Tiger, Ram, Serpent, Monkey Rabbit, Dragon (1984) and Untitled [Lions, Serpent Wall, Zodiac Benches] (1999) were previously commissioned by San Francisco Arts Commission for Portsmouth Square and are planned for integration into the redesigned park’s play area.

The sculptures are in the Civic Art Collection and their integration and the process for relocation within the park is managed by the San Francisco Arts Commission.

(Left) Mary Fuller McChesney. *Ram, Serpent, Rabbit, Dragon*, cast concrete. 1985. Collection of the City & County of San Francisco. Gift of the Tamarack Foundation and the Mayor’s Office of Community Development to San Francisco Arts Commission.

(Right) Mary Fuller McChesney. *Untitled*, cast concrete. Collection of the City & County of San Francisco.

REMOVAL AND RELOCATION



(Left) Pro-democracy protestors wave flags in front of the Goddess of Democracy statue, 1989, Tiananmen Square. Photography by Peter Charlesworth/LightRocket; Courtesy of Getty Images.

(Right) Goddess of Democracy statue, 2012, San Francisco. Photography by Carol M. Highsmith; Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Thomas Marsh. *Goddess of Democracy*, bronze on granite. Collection of the City & County of San Francisco, Gift of the Goddess of Democracy Project.



Goddess of Democracy

The Goddess of Democracy Monument is not recommended for removal at this time and is planned for relocation within the park. The Monument is a recreation of the original statue built by students in Tianamen Square in 1989 and was a gift to the city by a community committee in 1994.

The sculpture is in the Civic Art Collection and the process for relocation within the park is managed by the San Francisco Arts Commission.

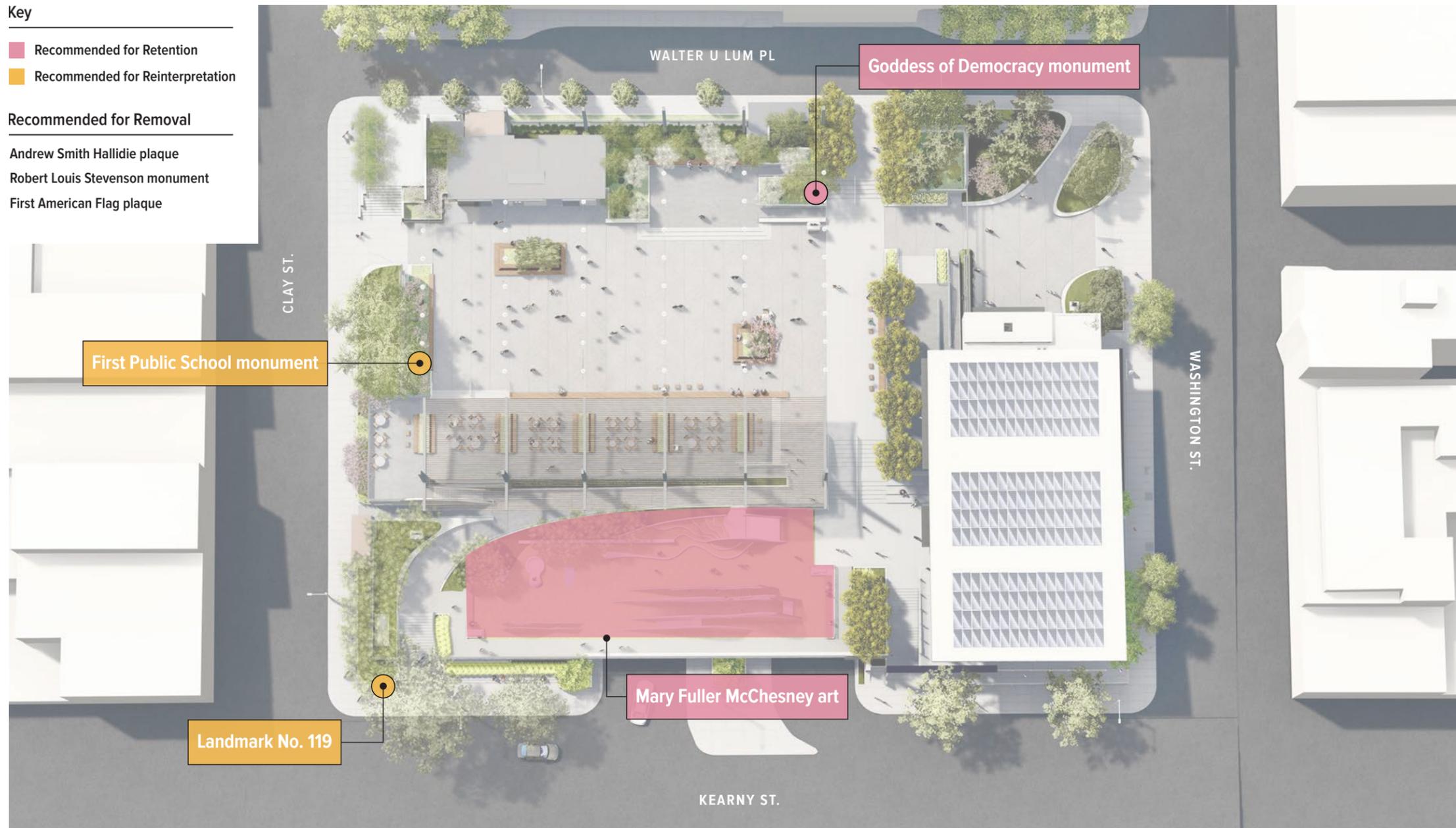
REINTERPRETATION

Key

- Recommended for Retention
- Recommended for Reinterpretation

Recommended for Removal

- Andrew Smith Hallidie plaque
- Robert Louis Stevenson monument
- First American Flag plaque



This master plan also makes recommendations for reinterpretation of certain existing monuments, plaques, and art; given that without reinterpretation they can condone harmful legacies as outlined in Appendix B.

Reinterpretation of monuments is an opportunity to correct plaques and add new storytelling of previously overlooked narratives including the contributions of: women, immigrants, indigenous people and people of color.

Plan view of Portsmouth Square Improvement Project with monuments and plaques recommended for retention and reinterpretation.

REINTERPRETATION

Portsmouth Square
State Registered Landmark No. 119

Community Feedback The State Register Landmark No. 119 plaque is recommended for amendment to update the listings of historical events at Portsmouth to be more relevant and inclusive to local communities.

The process for amendment, which includes revising State Landmark nomination documents and applying for California State Landmark Status, is as follows outlined by San Francisco Planning:

The San Francisco Planning Department will prepare a revised State Landmark nomination application which offers a more comprehensive and inclusive history of Portsmouth Square. The nomination application will include peer-review by community stakeholders and local historians. Upon approval of the nomination by California Office of Historic Preservation, an updated plaque will be installed in the redesigned park.



Portsmouth Plaza An Historic Shrine, 2012, Portsmouth Square. Published by NoeHill.

REINTERPRETATION



Commemorative marker for the first public school in California, 2016, Portsmouth Square. Published by Tobias Kleinlercher; Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

First Public School in California Plaque

The First Public School in California Plaque commemorates the erection of the first public school in 1848 established with the help of Douglass Leidesdorff, a prominent Black and Jewish man who served on the school board and city council. The school was open only for a few months before closing in response to the Gold Rush.

Community Feedback Based on community input, San Francisco Planning and RPD is supporting the reinterpretation to acknowledge the complex history of access, discrimination, and advancements in education for people of color in San Francisco.

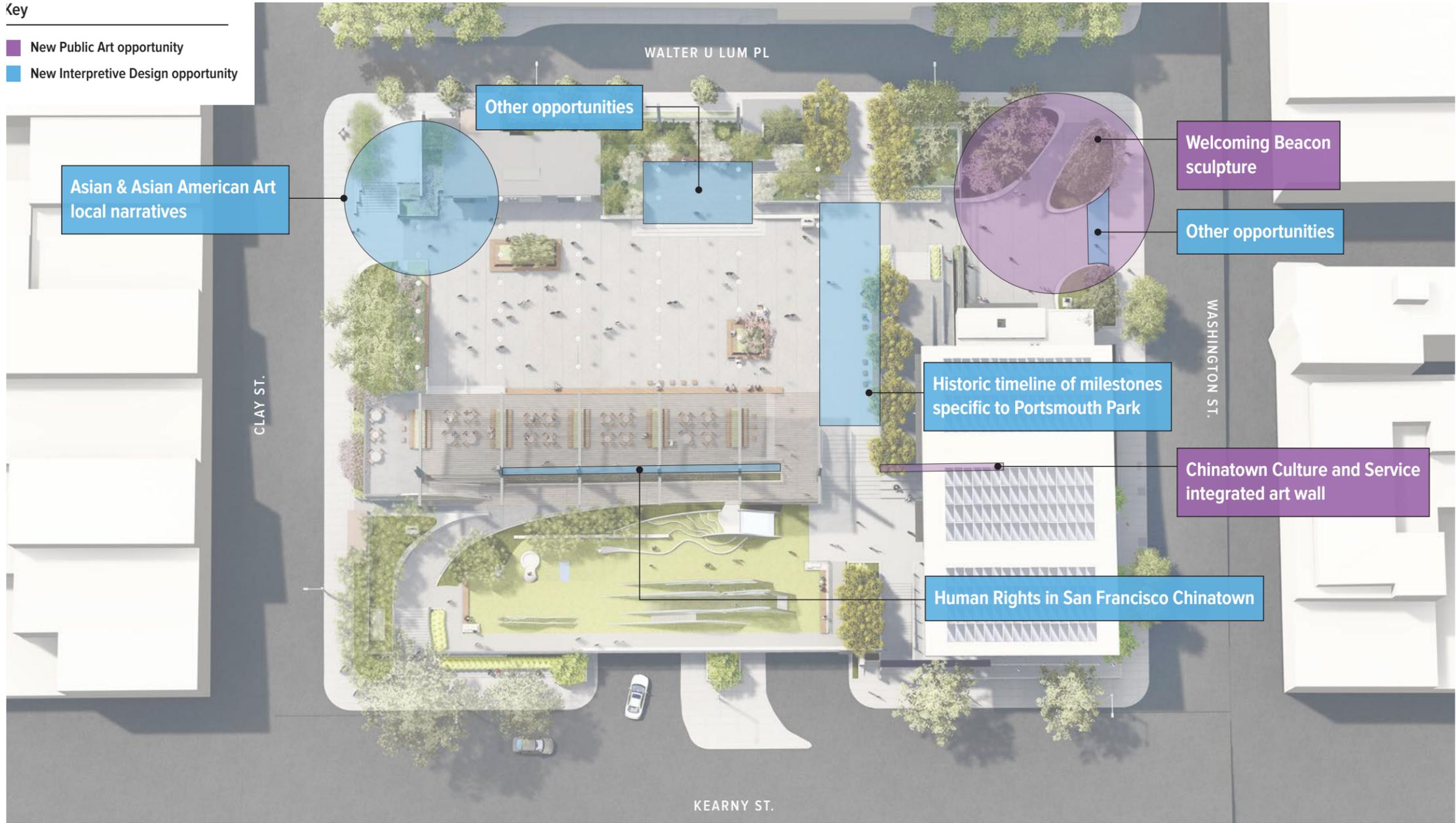
The reinterpretation should be additive. A new interpretive sign should be placed in direct proximity to the existing plaque as shown and the design should be developed within the following parameters.

Refer to Appendix C for information relating to sign details and content specification.



**INTERPRETIVE STORIES AND ART:
NEW INSTALLATIONS**

VISITOR EXPERIENCE



While reinterpretation will be co-located with existing monuments, plaques, and arts there are multiple opportunities identified for new interpretive design integrated throughout the park in consideration of the visitor experience.

Whether a visitor is quickly passing through or immersed in a guided tour of Chinatown, the new interpretation and art should be impactful and reflective of the vibrant history, culture, and values of the surrounding community.

Plan view of Portsmouth Square Improvement Project showing opportunities recommended for new public art and interpretation. San Francisco Planning and Recreation and Parks Department are coordinating with local Native American representatives on design and location of a Native American land acknowledgment for the park (not shown on plan).

INTERPRETIVE STORIES



Interpretive panels attached to railing located at Crane Cove Park in San Francisco. Photo by Clearstory.

Human Rights in San Francisco Chinatown
Located under gateway shade structure on the railings overlooking historic and bustling Kearny street is an opportunity for a continuous series of panels interpreting narratives of human rights in San Francisco Chinatown previously untold in the public space.* The series of panels allows for text and image rich content at this location. Under the shade structure and off of the main path of travel, audiences can spend time at this installation reading stories and gazing outwards across the neighborhood below where many of the narratives take place.

Community Feedback Asian and Asian American and Pacific Islander stories haven't been featured in the park. The storytelling of the park should reflect the people of the Chinatown community.

*During the community input phase of the project the location considered for this new interpretive opportunity was the wall along the accessible access walkway that transverses the park. However, concerns about ADA compliance have prompted a relocation for the main components of the exhibit as shown. During the design phase, including some components, like an introduction plaque, within compliant areas of the original location, should be considered given that the walkway is a primary circulation path for visitors to the park.

Refer to Appendix C for information relating to sign details and content specification.

INTERPRETIVE STORIES



Historic Timeline

Located at the “spine” of the park is an opportunity to embed a timeline of events and milestones specific to Portsmouth Square, allowing visitors to ‘walk through time’ in the park. Due to the nature of embedding material into paving these listings of events in the timeline should remain relatively simple in design and low in word count.

The timeline could be used to support both walking tours of the park as well as to prompt self guided research and discovery. Content in the timeline can intersect with the content of other more text-rich interpretations in the park and be expanded upon therein.

Refer to Appendix C for information relating to sign details and content specification.

Timeline graphic embedded in the ground plane at Yokohama Nanbu Market. BRANCH, 2019, Yokohama, Kanagawa. Photography by Takahiro Shimizu.

INTERPRETIVE STORIES



Freestanding interpretive sign panels with multi-lingual text and graphics.
(Left) CCRZ: Sabeca Cement Plant Requalification Project, Switzerland.
(Right) Public Space Interpretation in Gyeongju, South Korea.



Asian and Asian American Art Local Narratives
Located at the Southwest entrance to the park is an opportunity to place an interpretive narratives of local Asian & Asian American Art, connecting the park to the neighborhood art culture and celebrating Asian & Asian American artists prominently. Available space for interpretation at this entrance allows for a moderate amount of text and image content.

Refer to Appendix C for information relating to sign details and content specification.

INTERPRETIVE STORIES

Other opportunities

There are additional opportunities identified for interpretive gestures on the ground plane at the park’s stage and the Northwest and Southwest entrances to the park. Due to the nature of embedding material into paving these gestures should remain relatively simple in design and low in word count. Options include an impactful quote, poem, or statement.

Refer to Appendix C for information relating to sign details and content specification.



Interpretive gestures embedded into furnishings and ground.
(Top Left) LUC: Abertarff Brass Leaves, 2008, Scotland.
(Bottom Left) Elkemo: Pirrama Park, 2010, Sydney.

(Top Right) Gunter Demnig: Stolperstone, 2013, Germany. Published by Philip Lee.
(Bottom Right) Weiss Manfredi: Cornell Sesquicentennial Grove, 2014, New York.

NEW PUBLIC ART AT PORTSMOUTH SQUARE

The San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC) is the City agency that champions the arts as essential to daily life by investing in a vibrant arts community, enlivening the urban environment and shaping innovative cultural policy.

San Francisco's earliest art policies date back to the establishment of the Arts Commission under the 1932 San Francisco Charter. The Charter gave the Arts Commission jurisdiction over all of the art belonging to the City and charged the Agency with the preservation and care of artwork in the Civic Art Collection.

Years later in 1969, the [Art Enrichment Ordinance](#) (the 2%-for-art program) was enacted to provide a guaranteed funding mechanism for the acquisition of artwork for new public facilities and civic spaces. The Ordinance ensures that two percent of the gross construction cost of civic buildings, transportation improvement projects, new parks, and other above-ground structures such as bridges, be allocated for public art.

The new public art opportunities and their project goals were determined for Portsmouth Square through a rigorous community engagement process and stakeholder input, as well as informed by the development of the Art & Interpretive Master Plan.



Yumei Hou, Yangge: Dance of the New Year, 2022, Chinatown-Rose Pak Station.
Photo by Ethan Kaplan Photography; Courtesy of the San Francisco Arts Commission.

NEW PUBLIC ART AT PORTSMOUTH SQUARE

SFAC's Role

SFAC will direct and manage the implementation of the two new public art opportunities and facilitate the relocation and maintenance of the existing artworks and monuments under SFAC jurisdiction at Portsmouth Square.

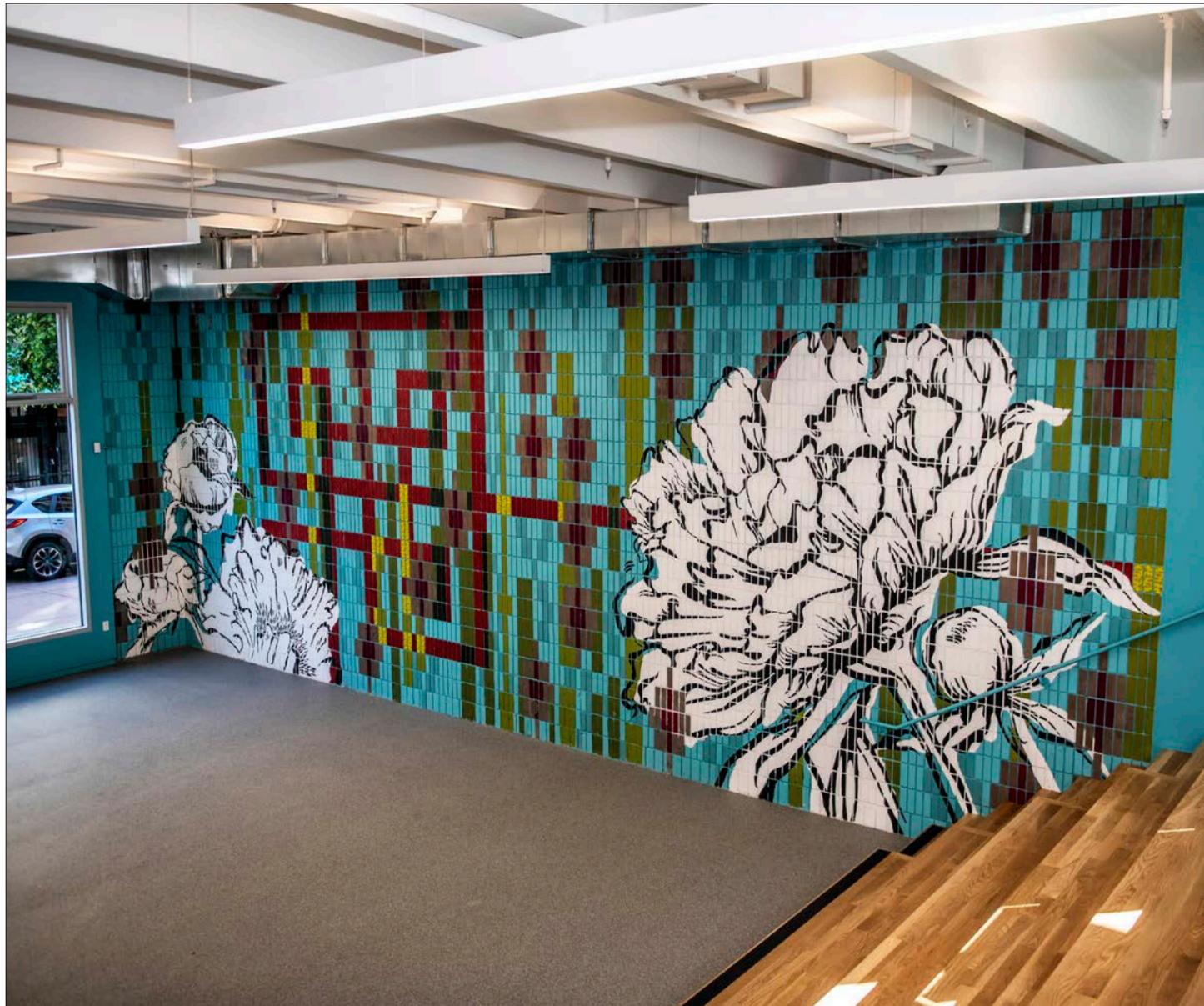
SFAC's scope of work includes:

- Prepare and issue the Chinatown Artist Registry Request for Qualification for the public art opportunities
- Establish the Chinatown Artist Registry pre-qualified pool
- Create shortlists of artists to be considered for the public art opportunities from the Chinatown Artist Registry pre-qualified pool
- Recruit panelists to serve on the artist review panels
- Facilitate artist review panels in order to determine artist finalists for the public art opportunities
- Conduct public meetings about the Portsmouth Square public art opportunities
- Manage all artists' and consultants' contracts
- Facilitate communications between artists and Rec and Park Department relative to specific art projects
- Consult with fine art conservators regarding maintenance and conservation requirements for permanent artworks
- Implement maintenance and conservation needs for permanent artworks at the site when required
- Procure signage for all artworks
- Promote, market and publicize public art activities
- Maintain all files related to public art opportunities



Michael Arcega, Auspicious Clouds | Heavy Fog, 2018, Broadway at Stockton Street.
Photo by the Artist; Courtesy of the San Francisco Arts Commission.

NEW PUBLIC ART AT PORTSMOUTH SQUARE



Julie Chang, Maiden's Dress, 2019, Willy "Woo Woo" Wong Playground. Photo by James Watkins; Courtesy of San Francisco Recreation and Parks.

Public Art Opportunities

The following art opportunities were determined for Portsmouth Square through a rigorous community engagement process and stakeholder input. The project plan for these art opportunities was presented and approved at the Art Commission's Visual Arts Committee on May 15, 2024 and approved by the Full Commission on June 3, 2024.

- 1. Sculpture:** Located at the corner entrance of Walter U Lum and Washington Street. Artwork will be a human-scale sculpture and may be comprised of durable, sustainable materials intended for exterior use, such as stone or metal. The goals for the sculpture opportunity include:
 - a. Acts as a welcoming beacon to the Portsmouth Square Plaza
 - b. Is highly visible from the street and draws people into the park space
 - c. Celebrates the people, history, and values of San Francisco's Chinatown communities
- 2. Integrated Art Wall:** Located on the large interior wall of the clubhouse and the adjacent exterior wall by the building entrance from the plaza. Artwork will measure approximately 606 square feet and may be comprised of a durable material, such as mosaic or ceramic tile. The Art Wall shall highlight the theme of "Chinatown Culture and Service" with goals that include:
 - a. Reflects community culture and community service in San Francisco Chinatown
 - b. Creates an impactful indoor and outdoor narrative experience
 - c. Bridges and enhances the connection between Portsmouth Square and its new community clubhouse
 - d. Involves a component of community engagement programming led by the selected artist



DEVELOPMENT OF NEW ART AND INTERPRETATION

SELECTION PROCESS FOR NEW PUBLIC ART

Artist Recruitment Approach and Eligibility

Arts Commission staff, in partnership with the Chinese Culture Center of San Francisco, will recruit artists for the opportunity through the Arts Commission's upcoming Chinatown Artist Registry Pre-qualified Pool. Professional practicing artists residing in the United States are eligible to apply. Arts Commission staff may also select artists from other prequalified artist lists to be considered.

Recruitment will focus on artists with a meaningful connection to San Francisco Chinatown, which may include if the artist currently resides, has resided in Chinatown, or has another significant connection to Chinatown. Artists will be asked to address their connection as part of the application process, and the review panel will be instructed to consider this connection as part of their scoring criteria.

Artist Selection Process

After the application deadline the Arts Commission staff will screen applications to establish the pool of artists meeting the minimum eligibility requirements, which are professional practicing artists who reside in the United States.

The eligible applications will be presented to an artist qualification panel consisting of 2 arts professionals and 1 SFAC staff, who will review and score the applications to add to the Chinatown Artist Registry Pre-qualified Pool. SFAC will create two qualified artist shortlists for each artwork opportunity from this Pool for consideration by the Artist Review Panel.

The two artist shortlists will be presented to the Portsmouth Square Improvement Artist Review

Panel consisting of 1 representative of the client agency, 4 arts professionals, and 1 community member. The panel will identify 3 finalists for each artwork opportunity who will be invited to develop conceptual site-specific proposals after attending an orientation session with the project team and key stakeholders. These finalists will be paid an honorarium of \$3,000 plus travel reimbursement for development of a proposal.

The Portsmouth Square Improvement Artist Review Panel will reconvene to consider the finalists' proposals in an interview format and will select one artist for each artwork opportunity for recommendation to the Art Commission.

Artist Selection Consideration

Artists and artwork will be selected in accordance with the Mission and Goals of the Civic Art Collection and in accordance with the criteria below. Criteria to be used when considering when scoring an artist's application for a commission shall include, but not be limited to the following considerations.

- Artistic Merit
- Relevant Skills & Experience
- Meet Project Goals
- The Artwork is Appropriate to the Site
- Feasibility, Maintainability
- Contributes to the Quality of the Civic Art Collection
- Public Safety and Accessibility
- No Duplications
- Meaningful Connection to San Francisco Chinatown

INTERPRETIVE CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

The next phases in the development of the interpretive program is content development and design. During these phases the interpretive program begins to become tangible and the master plan guides that work.

Interpretive Design

The design phase begins once the content is developed to approximately 75% completion. The design phase addresses the development of the physical components of the program. The design will establish a unifying, high-quality visual communication system that will amplify to the content and will meet accessibility guidelines. Along the design process there will be periodic review and meetings with the Community.

The Mitigation Measure M-TCR-1 Public Interpretation Land Acknowledgment will be developed in the design phase. San Francisco Recreation and Park has begun the process of engaging with local Native American representatives.

The Mitigation Measure M-CR-1a “Oral History” requirements will be further defined in the next phase of design and will inform the content development phase of the interpretative program.

Interpretive Content Development

During the content development phase, there will be new team members whose role will be to further research, outline, define, edit and develop the content (words and imagery) for each story that will be told while also creatively integrating design principles throughout the program.

This content development effort will also include difficult editorial choices, as not all valuable stories will fit within the park’s boundary. Along this process there will be periodic review and meetings with the Community.

UNITY TRADITIONS RESPONSIVE EDUCATION **INSPIRE**
 CONNECTIONS PUBLIC **LOCAL** LANDMARK
 DIVERSITY ACTION RECOGNITION THREADS STORYTELLING
 GATHERING **HISTORY** **SITE SPECIFICITY** CONVERSATION
 SERVICE NEIGHBORHOOD RELATIONSHIPS PLACEMAKING
 EMPOWER **COMMUNITY FORTITUDE** IMPACT
 ROOTS CIVIC MEANINGFUL FUTURE LIVING ROOM SAN FRANCISCO
 OUTREACH **EXPERIENCE** **ART & ACTIVISM**
 VISION ENVIRONMENT UNDERSTANDING **LEGACY**
 AWKNOWLEDGMENT ADVOCACY **CULTURE** GUIDANCE SOLIDARITY

INTERPRETIVE CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

Guiding Principles Applied

The guiding principles outlined in this document serve as the high level parameters for the design phase including and content development and design layouts.

In the ethos of “for us by us” all interpretive content copy (body text) should be written and displayed in Chinese first (1 variety) and translated to English second. The content development team will include Chinese, Asian American, and Pacific Islander scholars along with Latinx scholars to provide information on their community’s history at Portsmouth Square. Content concerning local Native Americans will be written by local Native American representatives.

When phrasing content, a voice that calls to action and inspires reflection will be utilized. The reader should be prompted with questions that direct them to engage with the park, not just as a historic site, but as an active and ongoing community cultural project.

The interpretive content developed in the design phase should remain specifically relevant to Portsmouth Square. Where it is found that supplemental “outside” context and media, like oral histories and learning modules, is beneficial to the Portsmouth interpretive narratives, QR codes can be added to designs to support an augmented experience.



APPENDICES

**Envisioning “Flower Garden Corner” 花園角:
The Living Room of Chinatown**

The Chinatown Arts & Cultural Coalition, along with its selected panel of expert community scholars, looks forward to monuments and art interpretations within San Francisco’s Portsmouth Square that celebrate the local community’s diversity, history, and continuing role as Chinatown’s “living room”. We have prepared a working statement that shares our vision, hopes, and dreams for a more community responsive development of our neighborhood.

Vision: The Chinatown Arts & Cultural Coalition envisions the “Flower Garden Corner” (a renamed Portsmouth Square) as a community space that celebrates and uplifts the stories and experiences of the First Nations, ancestors, elders, families, youth, and human beings representing cultures and identities that resonate with this historic gathering space, contemporary life and its future. Essential to this vision is the renaming of the park to better reflect the park’s role in the community, and to provide monuments and symbols that honor the community’s rich and lively histories of **ART, ACTIVISM, AND ACCOUNTABILITY**.

Renaming Portsmouth Square: An Affirmation of the Living Room of Chinatown: First and foremost, we believe that Portsmouth Square should be renamed and rooted in the interpretation given to it by its Cantonese residents. In Cantonese, the park is known as the “Flower Garden Corner”, all of which are representative of how the community sees the park: **Flower** (representing our future generations), **Garden** (representing care, community solidarity, and continuity), **Corner** (representing the four directions and all histories that guide us). This renaming will send a message that we are seen and we matter. Beyond symbolism, the “Flower Garden Corner” establishes the square/park/space as the “living room” of Chinatown. The park was advocated for by the community and is used daily by residents, families, community members, and service providers to gather, meet, and make memories. In the renaming of the square, there should be an updated, culturally responsive description of the park describing the histories of Chinatown and Manilatown on the San Francisco Parks and Recreation website. The current description of Portsmouth Square has no recognition or acknowledgment of the communities in which it’s situated:

<https://sfrecpark.org/893/Portsmouth-Square>

Values and Actions: To ensure that our vision is fulfilled and that our stories are not forgotten or erased, we have outlined actions based on our values:

VALUES	Inclusion & Additions	Change
ART: Art and culture in the Flower Garden Corner should reflect the historical and contemporary	Artwork by local Asian American artists, indigenous peoples, and people of color. Artwork that reflects the stories and experiences of people in the community. Artwork that honors Asian American activism.	Remove monuments that represent colonial legacies that have harmed our community.

communities that have contributed to the cultural sustainability of Chinatown.	Suggestion: Historic Asian American timeline embedded in the ground of the parameter of the Flower Garden Corner. This could provide a walking tour of Asian American history.	
ACTIVISM: The Flower Garden Corner should pay homage to the legacy of Asian American Activism.	The Flower Garden Corner should highlight that it is the birthplace of Asian American Activism and Iconic Asian American community service organizations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asian Law Caucus Chinatown Community Development Center Chinese for Affirmative Action Chinese Culture Center Chinese Historical Society of America Chinese Progressive Association International Hotel Tenants Association / Manilatown Heritage Foundation Katipunan ng Demokratikong Pilipino Kearny Street Workshop On Lok Self-Help for the Elderly Wu Yee Children’s Services 	Reinterpretation of current monuments to be more reflective of the Chinatown community’s history and to redress overlooked contributions of women, immigrants, indigenous people and people of color: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> First San Francisco School monument: Rather than memorializing a school that only existed for a few months and which did not allow students of color to attend, we would like this monument to either be removed or re-interpreted to also acknowledge Chinatown as the location of the First Bilingual Education program in San Francisco or Tape v. Hurley.
ACCOUNTABILITY: The Flower Garden Corner should ensure that the design, activities, and education are intentional and accountable to the historic and contemporary communities in Chinatown	Community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chinatown Family Associations and their importance to Chinatown, US, and civil rights Historic Manilatown as the first Filipino village in San Francisco SROs and the Migratory Chinese and Filipino Workforce: Their contributions to the success of the Central California farming, San Francisco Hotel & Restaurant, and Pacific Northwest Cannery industries. Impact of Redevelopment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1977 International Hotel Eviction: The most dramatic housing rights battleground in American history. Redevelopment and fight for cultural and open space: bridge, CCC, Hilton Sunrise in Portsmouth Square 	Remove the following monuments that do not best represent this community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Robert Louis Stevenson Monument: This writer lived in Chinatown for a very short time (3 months) and was not an active community contributor during that time. Cable Car Monument: This cable car line is known by the local community as the Cable Car line that allowed wealthy San Franciscans to distance themselves from the communities of color that inhabited Chinatown. There is also a cable car museum already located in San Francisco.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Native American, contemporary lives and use as living room, importance of sunshine and activism in the Square <p>Birthplace of key iconic figures and movements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bruce Lee, Bernice Bing • Housing rights • Elder care and bachelor society 	<p>First Flag monument: We would like this monument to be re-interpreted to celebrate all of Chinatown's "firsts":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Bilingual Education program in San Francisco • Legal Firsts and civil rights spearheaded by the Chinese American community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yick Wo vs. Hopkins: Equal Protection Under the Law ○ Miranda Act ○ Political Asylum ○ Wong Kim Ark: Birthright Citizenship ○ Tape v. Hurley: Address School Segregation and Equal Rights (woman led)
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Possible Mediums for Storytelling

- Welcoming public display that shows a Map of Chinatown and Historic Manilatown identifying the locations of both current and historic locations of merit
- PDF Maps of the Portsmouth Square public display map that allows visitors to take self-paced walks through Portsmouth Square, Chinatown and Historic Manilatown. The map would identify both current and historic locations.
- Guided Walking Tour of Portsmouth Square, Chinatown, and Historic Manilatown with local cultural stewards.
- QR Codes leading to UCLA's Asian American Studies multimedia modules for more comprehensive information on most of the Asian American stories and themes stated above.
- Themes incorporated into artwork and/or garden

Chinatown Arts and Culture Coalition

Founded in 2017, CACC was formed to advocate for equitable arts and culture in Chinatown. Its goal is to ensure community representation, equity and advocacy to shape the narrative of the community, against stereotypes and gentrification. Its membership includes artists, community members and staff from neighborhood stakeholders in arts and culture, community development.



October 16, 2023

To: San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department
San Francisco Arts Commission

RE: Keeping Chinese and Asian American Art and History Centered in the Portsmouth Square Monuments and Interpretation Conversation

The undersigned call for the inclusion of community voices and stories throughout the interpretative process of determining which public art is to remain in Portsmouth Square. **Portsmouth Square is Chinatown's Living Room.** It is a cherished community hub for gathering, leisure, and cultural experiences. Therefore, the public art and storytelling in the Square must reflect the people of Chinatown.

There is a longstanding exclusion of Chinese and Asian American presence represented in public art and public spaces in the City. Of the seven artwork and commemorations currently in Portsmouth Square, there are zero artworks created by artists of Asian descent in the Square and zero commemoration of any Asian American history.

The community demands that these four considerations are put forward:

1. **REINTERPRET monuments that condone racist and harmful legacies** by correcting plaques and adding new storytelling displays. In the new narrative, include overlooked contributions of women, immigrants, indigenous people and people of color. The monuments to be reinterpreted include: First American Flag Marker, First Public School in California Plaque (where Chinese students were not allowed), Portsmouth Plaza Plaque (mentioning events

such as the announcement of discovery of gold in 1849, site of refuge after the 1906 Earthquake)

2. **REMOVE monuments that do not represent this neighborhood and are unfit for reinterpretation.** This includes the Robert Louis Stevenson Monument (this writer lived in Chinatown for a very short time and was not an active community contributor during that time), and the Andrew Hallidie Smith Marker (commemorating the original terminus of the city's first cable car. This cable car line was understood by the local community as the Cable Car line that allowed wealthy San Franciscans to distance themselves from the communities of color that inhabited Chinatown. There is also a cable car museum already located in San Francisco.)
3. **INCLUDE critical community stories:** Portsmouth Square park is, in many ways, one of the centers of gravity for Asian American (and thus *American*) history. From being the boundary line for the original Manilatown, to being a crucial community resource for Chinatown, and the site of groundbreaking civil rights struggles like the International Hotel eviction in 1977, the park holds many important stories and historical moments, none of which are highlighted or memorialized.
4. **FUND maintenance and construction of relevant community artwork:** Funding and resources must also be saved for works that are relevant to the community rather than spent on upkeep and maintenance on works that remain irrelevant for a historical and vibrant present-day community.

The reinterpretation and the selection and building of new monuments and statues must reflect the histories of the communities who actually call this neighborhood home. As such, the undersigned community organizations push Clearstory, SFAC, Recreation and Parks Department, and SF Planning to put forth a plan and proposal for a park that will reflect the values and history of the vibrant community within which it is situated.

Sincerely,

API Council
Chinatown Community Development Center
Chinatown Chamber of Commerce
Chinese Cultural Center
Committee for Better Parks and Recreation in Chinatown
Community Tenants Association
Community Youth Center
Edge on the Square
Manilatown Heritage Foundation
Rose Pak Community Fund



Self-Help for the Elderly
SRO Families United Collaborative

CC: Recreation and Parks Commissioner Vanita Louie
D3 Supervisor Aaron Peskin
Lydia So

APPENDIX C - INTERPRETIVE INSTALLATION SPECIFICATIONS

First Public School in California Plaque

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FORM	1 freestanding plaque located in planting or plaque attached to park infrastructure (to be determined in design phase)
MATERIAL & FABRICATION	Materials and Fabrication: Fabricated porcelain enamel pan signs (with four mixed colors and CMYK halftones for photo reproduction) mounted between 4" aluminum painted posts 72" tall above grade with footing as required, 1" square tube fabricated frames painted to match posts, mechanically secure porcelain enamel to posts.
SIZE	12" x 18" (approximately)
FONT SIZE	3/8" body copy, 1/4" caption
WORD COUNT	50-65 (per English translation*)
IMAGERY	1 image
LANGUAGE	Chinese and English
SUGGESTED CONTENT	Acknowledgement of exclusion of Chinese and students of color, the school's founding by William Leidesdorff Jr, of Jewish and mixed-race Creole descent

Human Rights in San Francisco Chinatown

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FORM	Up to qty. 15 rail-mounted panels (to be determined in design phase)
MATERIAL & FABRICATION	Fabricated porcelain enamel (with four mixed colors and CMYK halftones for photo reproduction), break panel form with pan construction, mechanically mounted to underside of rail.
SIZE	11" x 54" (approximately) each
FONT SIZE	3/8" body copy, 1/4" caption
WORD COUNT	150-180 (per English translation*)
IMAGERY	2-6 per panel
LANGUAGE	Chinese and English
POSSIBLE STORIES	Tape v Hurley, 1885 (equal right for all children to public education), Yick Wo v. Hopkin, 1886 (equal protection under the law), US v. Wong Kim Ark, 1898 (landmark case for birthright citizenship), Lau v. Nichols, 1974 (right to bilingual language instruction in classrooms); housing rights, historic Manilatown, International Hotel eviction, Ping Yuen tenants' strike, Dr. Rolland Lowe; redevelopment and fight for cultural open space: CCC, public transit advocacy, bridge at Hilton, fight for City College campus, redesign of Portsmouth Square

Historic Timeline

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FORM	15-18 plaques on ground plane
MATERIAL & FABRICATION	Etched stainless steel or bronze embedded in concrete paving, flush mounted with proper grout and mechanical attachment to prevent popping
SIZE	9" x 27" (approximately) each
FONT SIZE	1/2" copy
WORD COUNT	25-30 (per English translation*)
IMAGERY	None
LANGUAGE	Chinese and English
POSSIBLE STORIES	Land Acknowledgement, The year Portsmouth Square park was founded, Chinese New Year Parade, Jenny Lind Theatre as city hall, Yerba Buena townsite and plaza, site of refugee camp after the 1906 earthquake and fire, site of a refugees camp for International Hotel evicted tenants, recent Portsmouth history

* English translated from Chinese requires approximately 150% more display area.

APPENDIX C - INTERPRETIVE INSTALLATION SPECIFICATIONS

Asian and Asian American Art Local Narratives

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FORM	Up to 3 post mounted signs (to be determined in design phase)
MATERIAL & FABRICATION	Fabricated porcelain enamel pan signs (with four mixed colors and CMYK halftones for photo reproduction) mounted between 4" aluminum painted posts 72" tall above grade with footing as required, 1" square tube fabricated frames painted to match posts, mechanically secure porcelain enamel to posts.
SIZE	24" x 36" each
FONT SIZE	3/8" body copy, 1/4" caption
WORD COUNT	200-250 (per English translation*)
IMAGERY	1-8 per sign
LANGUAGE	Chinese and English
POSSIBLE STORIES	Activist art and poetry, Kearny Street Workshop, Heritage art both cultural and modern, May's Photography Studio, birthplace of iconic artists: Bruce Lee, Bernice Bing, current and existing arts and cultural organizations (ex: CCC, Edge on the Square, Manilatown Heritage Foundation)

Other Opportunities

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FORM	Letterforms on ground plan or stair riser
MATERIAL & FABRICATION	Bronze or stainless steel embedded in concrete paving, flush mounted with proper grout and attachment to prevent popping, or custom formwork with letterforms, poured in place with finish concrete
SIZE	TBD
FONT SIZE	4" +/-
WORD COUNT	N/A
LANGUAGE	Chinese and English
POSSIBLE STORIES	Activist poetry, Asian American consciousness and solidarity

* English translated from Chinese requires approximately 150% more display area.