

Creating Spaces for the Community of San Francisco

6 June 2022

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Abstract:

This project aims to make San Francisco more accessible to the homeless population by focusing on access to public facilities, concentrating on reducing administrative barriers to creating new homes, and attempting to make changes to the housing crisis that grips San Francisco today. This project aims to increase accessibility to public bathrooms, create designated public showers, and change anti-homeless infrastructure to create spaces for the community of San Francisco in order to increase the quality of life for the community. This project seeks to increase the constrained supply of affordable housing within San Francisco in an attempt to give more of the community housing. Although this proposal seeks to make San Francisco more inclusive by offering more housing and basic amenities, it will also seek to become more equitable by eliminating hostile infrastructure in an effort to recognize everyone's situation. This proposal aims to create a more equitable and higher quality of life for the community of San Francisco. By focusing on access to basic resources, and addressing policies to attempt to change the housing crisis, this proposal will work to create spaces for the community of San Francisco.

Background:

San Francisco, California, currently has the third highest homeless population in California, with just over 8,000 people without homes in the city. The Tenderloin district within San Francisco houses almost half of the homeless population within San Francisco— a district widely known for its drug and crime rates (CBS, 2022). The mayor of San Francisco declared the Tenderloin district as a state of emergency last December, as the houseless population continues to grow within San Francisco and the Tenderloin district (CBS, 2022). Many factors lead to San Francisco's high homeless population rate— mental illness and drug addiction are often the leading causes that are thought to cause homelessness within San Francisco.

However, the highest percentage goes to not being able to afford rent. San Francisco is currently one of the most expensive cities to live in (Lien). San Francisco has the second to highest wealth disparity within America— the 95th percentile earned upwards of \$350,000 per year, while the bottom 20th percentile barely makes \$20,000. The wealth disparity is currently driving prices up, and also driving people out of their homes (Vox). Over 63% of the homeless population have stated that they were forced to evict due to high rents, and 11% of the homeless population even still have jobs but can't afford rent (SF Chronicle, 2021). San Francisco has long grappled with an intense housing crisis that contributes directly to the homeless population. Because San Francisco is a highly coveted place to live in, more people with more money are trying to move into existing housing units. This then gives landlords and real estate speculators the incentive to increase the cost of existing stock, even evicting tenants. Although the solution would be to build more housing to support all of the population within San Francisco, the city's stringent regulations make it difficult to do this. So, instead of an adequate housing supply, costs are rising faster than most San Franciscans can keep up with, and more and more people are being seen without homes (Vox). According to the director of the San Francisco branch of the

Coalition for the Homeless, the lack of investment in affordable housing has been one of the key contributors to homelessness (Vox).

San Francisco has also been known to have hostile infrastructure intended to keep the homeless population away from sleeping on the streets. Homeowners in Mission Dolores, a district within San Francisco, raised \$2,000 to place 24, 100-pound boulders on the sidewalks of Dolores and Market streets to keep homeless residents from sleeping on the streets (McPherson, 2019). Other places in San Francisco resurface smooth sidewalks with pebbles, gravel, and rocks so it's difficult to sit. There's the modification of public benches to include multiple arm rests and curving them to make it impossible to sleep, along with placing retractable spikes on stoops, stairs, porches, and placing permanent spikes in restaurant and store enclaves. Retail stores have also placed speakers that emit an alarm to drive homeless people away (McPherson, 2019). Before the pandemic, the mayor of San Francisco had also increased the number of public toilets from three locations to twenty four in the Tenderloin district (Moench, 2021). But due to the pandemic, the city removed many of them due to "lack of money". However, emails from earlier that year also described that the head of the city's Healthy Streets Operation Center pushed Public Works to remove toilets after encampments were cleared to prevent people from re-settling in an area (Moench, 2021).

In an attempt to lower the number of residents off the streets, California drafted a "right to shelter law" that ensured temporary housing for anyone who wanted it. However, this law was met with criticism within San Francisco because critics say, much like anti-homeless architecture, this law is merely placing a bandaid on the issue of unaffordable permanent housing (McPherson, 2019). Thus, although solutions have been attempted to help the homeless

population, the ultimate solution should be working to build more affordable housing for the city of San Francisco.

Proposed Solution:

My proposed solution attempts to address three aspects to improve the homeless population in San Francisco. My proposal aims to improve the housing crisis, work on finding alternate solutions rather than implementing hostile infrastructure, and improve access to public facilities such as bathrooms and showers.

As stated above, the housing crisis is a prominent issue within San Francisco that serves to contribute directly to the increased rates of homelessness in San Francisco. In order to enhance resilience within the San Francisco community, helping to solve the housing crisis would focus on equity. Creating housing for everyone in San Francisco would enhance equity because it would seek to guarantee basic human rights regardless of race, gender, income, ability, and other factors. My proposal seeks to create less stringent regulations on creating housing, and instead focus on how to maximize the space in the city. San Francisco recently voted on Measure B, a ballot initiative that would make it more difficult to construct tall buildings on the San Francisco waterfront (Vox). This exacerbates San Francisco's housing affordability problems, and so my proposal aims to reverse this measure. Instead of restricting the amount of buildings being constructed, San Francisco should reallocate some square footage into creating more space for affordable housing. San Francisco currently boasts having 220 parks within the city. The city's 220 parks currently account for 20 percent of San Francisco, with a median size of 1.6 acres (Compass, 2017). A lot of these parks already contain a high number of homeless encampments—Golden Gate Park, one of the biggest parks in San Francisco, struggles with homeless encampments throughout the park. If a portion of these parks were reallocated towards creating

more square footage, this would help to create more housing that would include more of the San Francisco community, and also create cleaner and safer parks because there would be less people without homes living in the park. This would help enhance resilience because it would seek to guarantee the basic human right of housing to all of the community of San Francisco.

A park that could be used as an example is San Francisco's Pier 49. 120 recreational vehicles were acquired by the city of San Francisco to house the homeless of two districts in San Francisco. The RV park— a transitional non-congregate shelter— comes with a variety of amenities such as a laundry department (Karlis, 2020). Unlike a homeless shelter, this RV park has less stringent regulations that allows those who move into the RV park to feel comfortable and safe. Although this park's future remains unknown, it is an example of the ownership sector in making a resilient community within San Francisco (Karlis, 2020). This park is an example of San Francisco being held accountable for ownership and control over their key resources, in this case, the housing sector.

When focusing on equity, San Francisco could work with nonprofits such as the Tenants Union to work on legislative and policy work to strengthen eviction protections and help those who are evicted maintain relocation benefits (Vox). Nonprofit organizations could also create policies that would help to create rent caps, or push through an anti-speculation tax to discourage real estate speculators from buying up rent-controlled properties, evicting the tenants, and selling off the units as condos (Vox). Other organizations could also help to work with families to secure affordable and subsidized accommodations. San Francisco could work to sponsor non-profit organizations such as St. Anthony's, an organization that partners with other housing organizations to build affordable units in the heart of the city for low-income senior citizens.

Addressing the housing crisis would thus enhance resilience because it would address the equity sector— ensuring that everyone was able to have access to a basic necessity that is housing.

Another way to create a resilient community within San Francisco is to enhance the quality of the community by seeking to make sure that San Francisco's basic goods and services are of good quality. This proposal aims to enhance the quality of this community by ensuring that everyone's rights to the basic qualities of life such as a bathroom or shower are accessible to everyone. San Francisco is infamous for having large amounts of animal and human feces on the pavements. This, coupled with the decline of public restrooms due to the Covid-19 pandemic results in the lack of a basic necessity and a declining quality of life for those who are unhoused and living on the streets. San Francisco's mayor had originally created 24 public restrooms in the Tenderloin district— the district that houses the greatest homeless population within San Francisco. However, as stated in the background, the pandemic shut the number of public restrooms down to 11 (Moench, 2021). 24/7 public restrooms are a basic necessity needed for the community of San Francisco as a whole— not only for the homeless population, but for anyone from the public who needs to go to the bathroom. This proposal seeks to place public restrooms in each neighborhood of San Francisco— the goal is to have at least one within each neighborhood of San Francisco and more if the neighborhood is bigger. Although this goal is ambitious, the city was able to create 31 public restrooms before the pandemic shut it down (Moench, 2021). There are 36 neighborhoods in San Francisco— and so if the city were to get a bit more funding from the Department of Public Works, through lobbying, this goal could be accomplished. This would help to increase the quality of life within the city of San Francisco because each neighborhood would be guaranteed the right to a public restroom, reducing the amount of feces on the sidewalks.

The San Francisco Bay Area also has no government run public showers. Akin to the right to use a bathroom, showering is also another basic necessity that any member of the community should be able to access. Funding should be allocated to create free public showers made available to anyone who needs it. Admittedly, this would require an incredible amount of funding allocated towards this proposal. Funding should come from the government, if possible, as the city of San Francisco should take ownership and have control over their key resources and enhance the quality of their community by ensuring that everyone's rights to basic qualities of life are accessible to everyone. Funding can also come from philanthropic organizations to obtain grants and loans in order to build free public showers for those who need it.

Lastly, to enhance the resilience of the San Francisco community, this proposal will emphasize the quality sector— to ensure that San Francisco's basic goods and services are of good quality. Hostile infrastructure is prominent within San Francisco— with homeowners often raising money to create hostile infrastructure in order to keep homeless residents from setting up tents (McPherson, 2019). Hostile architecture purposely targets the homeless community, an already marginalized group, many of whom need places to rest and shelter during the day and night. Hostile architecture compounds the moral crisis of San Francisco's housing shortage, and this type of architecture doesn't give people with no homes a place to rest or be safe (McPherson, 2019). Instead of focusing on building hostile infrastructure, the focus should be shifted towards creating policies that would help to keep the houseless from living off the streets. As mentioned in the background, California created a "right to shelter" law that ensured temporary housing for anyone who wanted it (McPherson, 2019). Instead of creating temporary solutions to backlog the creation of permanent solutions, the "right to shelter" law should allow for permanent housing for anyone who needs it. To help with the housing crisis in San Francisco, this proposal suggests

getting rid of strict zoning codes, especially within San Francisco. This would help to speed up the process of developing multi-family housing, which would allow for more people to live in a building, helping to minimize the amount of square footage that is being used to build new homes. San Francisco could follow the footsteps of Oregon, who eliminated single-family zoning in cities with more than 10,000 residents (McPherson, 2019). With this law implemented, San Francisco would have to permit triplexes and fourplexes on any lots where they would approve single-family homes, and this law would also reduce restrictions on remodeling large homes into apartments (Shumway, 2021). Creating more multifamily complexes would help to reduce the housing crisis by creating more homes, while also allowing for more people to get affordable housing. Building more duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes would help to create more housing while also limiting the amount of square footage that the buildings take up. This will also help to boost neighborhood diversity, because it would allow for all different kinds of people to move in together. This would also enhance the ownership sector of the resilience criteria, as this part of the proposal aims to keep San Francisco accountable for ownership and control over their key resources including housing. Although building affordable housing is the simple solution, San Francisco's development regulations create density restrictions that artificially limit the number of units allowed in a project. On top of that, since San Francisco is a highly coveted place to live for those in the tech industry, there is the financial incentive to build luxury housing versus affordable housing, further exacerbating the houseless crisis within San Francisco. In order to create a more resilient and welcoming community within San Francisco, the city should be able to find a balance with building luxury buildings and affordable housing. With the use of multi-family complexes and less stringent regulations on housing, San Francisco would be able to help solve the housing crisis and help give everyone affordable housing.

Thus, in order to help make San Francisco a more resilient community, this proposal aims to create more housing for everyone within the community, get rid of hostile infrastructure, and improve access to public facilities such as bathrooms and showers. This would enhance equity because this solution would guarantee the basic human right of housing and sanitation regardless of race, gender, income and class. It would enhance quality by ensuring that everyone's rights to basic qualities of life such as a bathroom or shower are accessible to everyone, and it would enhance ownership by keeping San Francisco accountable for ownership and their control over key resources such as their housing sector and public facilities.

Project Activity:

The timeline of this proposed project would take a while, since it would require the building of housing units. I propose for this part of the project to be implemented within 3 years, as this is an urgent matter that cannot be delayed. The tasks that would be required would first be to work with the government and use lobbying tactics to urge the government to create less stringent regulations on creating more housing units within San Francisco. With the help of non-profit organizations and consulting firms, they could construct policies and suggestions that would maximize the space within San Francisco for housing. These firms and organizations would also create policy memos that would suggest how to reallocate a portion of the 220 parks that San Francisco currently has. Then the government would take action into reallocating part of the square footage into building affordable housing. The next step that would be taken is to work with non profit organizations to push for rent caps, anti-speculation taxes, and secure affordable and subsidized accommodations. The government would help to fund these non-profit organizations so that such actions are taken, and these organizations would work to strengthen their ability to tackle these actions. The second course of action that needs to be pursued is

ensuring the access to public restrooms and showers. This course of action should take around 1 year, to get funding from the government and philanthropies to build public bathrooms and free public showers around each neighborhood of San Francisco. The last step that should be taken is to discourage the use of hostile infrastructure, and instead work with the government to get rid of strict zoning codes. This process, similar to the first proposal, would take around 3 years.

Consulting firms would lobby the city of San Francisco to get rid of strict zoning codes, and instead encourage the development of multi-family housing and complexes. The city would then be able to build more multi-family housing complexes to help create more affordable housing.

Overall, this whole process would take around 3 years to complete, to create more spaces for the community of San Francisco.

Stakeholders and Resources:

As listed in the section above, a big part of the people being involved will be the government, and lobbying groups such as residents of San Francisco or consulting firms. The government's role is to take ownership in their actions and listen to those who are creating policy memos for the government to see. The consulting firms, lobbying groups, and the residents of San Francisco also have a big task in creating policy agendas that would address repurposing park grounds into creating more space for housing, getting rid of stringent regulations to build more houses, and creating laws that would allow for the building of multi-family complexes. Philanthropy groups such as the San Francisco Foundation should also take part in helping to fund public bathrooms and showers across each neighborhood within the city. The government's role is to then ensure that these bathrooms and showers are built across the neighborhood.

There are relevant projects that could be drawn on to be used as an example for this proposed solution. Programs like Hamilton and Compass are working with families to secure

affordable and subsidized housing, while St. Anthony's partners with Mercy housing to build 90 affordable units in the heart of the city for low-income citizens (Vox). San Francisco can look to Oregon's single-family zoning law to help create less stringent regulations on building multi-family complexes (Shumway, 2021). The city had also begun a public toilets program before the pandemic shut it down, so the government could continue to run these toilets through the help of the Department of Public Works, who already has experience in building these public toilets (Moench, 2021). Lastly, San Francisco could use the example of Pier 49 as an example of what a successful repurposed park could look like: although the site's future remains up in the air, it is an example of a successful community that helps welcome the houseless off the streets.

Obstacles and Next Steps:

The potential obstacles that I see to my proposed solution is government inaction and lack of funding. There is the potential that the government would not take ownership of their access to key resources such as housing and public restrooms. Even with the intense lobbying of consulting firms and the residents of San Francisco, there are no repercussions if the government would not take action. There is also the potential of lack of funding, as this has been the case for many years within San Francisco. My suggested solutions to these obstacles is that the residents and groups within San Francisco should work to keep the government accountable for their actions. Through phone calls, rallies, petitions, and emails, the government should constantly be receiving policy agendas as to the actions they should implement. For the potential lack of funding, the suggested solution is to contact as many philanthropy organizations, along with working to allocate funds that are being used somewhere else towards the housing crisis. For example, if San Francisco is overfunding the police department, a portion of the funds dedicated towards the police department could be redirected towards this solution. Therefore, the most

important step towards making this project successful in the near future is to increase accountability within the public to keep the government accountable. The next important step is to ensure that there is enough funding, and if not, look towards departments that are being funded and ask for transparency to prove that they are being overfunded and their funds could be allocated elsewhere. Lastly, making this project viable in the long term is to make sure that everyone is aware of the solution as it takes a collective effort to make San Francisco a more welcoming space for everyone. Thus, although there are potential obstacles that could hinder San Francisco from becoming a more welcoming space for everyone, there are steps that can be taken to ensure that this project is viable in the near future, along with in the long term.

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