



## **Russian Hill Neighbors**

### **Land Use and Development Principles**

**October 2017**

Russian Hill Neighbors, an organization of neighborhood volunteers, working collaboratively with all, seeks to preserve, advance and celebrate neighborhood character and quality of life.

Russian Hill is one of the densest residential areas of San Francisco and it is home to some of the most significant historic resources in the City, including three National Register listed districts and several San Francisco designated landmarks. It is therefore RHN's priority to preserve Russian Hill's established character, scale and diversity of design, as well as to protect its historic resources. Further, it is RHN's policy to advocate for economically diverse housing options, including those suited to families with children.

Furthermore, RHN works with neighborhood merchants to promote businesses within its boundaries, including those located along commercial corridors and individual small businesses located throughout its residential streets.

At the same time, RHN embraces compatible new development, appropriately located and designed, that would further these objectives and the principles outlined below.

RHN encourages project sponsors to engage with its Design, Zoning and Land Use (DZLU) Committee early in the planning and design process. We have well-established relationships with the Planning Department, Planning Commission and other elected officials. We regularly communicate with them about our design principles and concerns. They recognize that our principles are guidelines, intended to supplement City regulations and guidelines (such as Urban Design Guidelines and Residential Design Guidelines). In evaluating projects, our primary goal is to ensure that the overall neighborhood is protected and enhanced.

The principles that RHN has adopted for guidance in evaluating projects are:

- 1. Housing Affordability and Diversity**
- 2. Family-Friendly Policies**
- 3. Thriving Businesses**
- 4. Welcoming Sidewalks and Public Spaces**
- 5. Responsive Transportation and Parking Policy**
- 6. Stewardship of Historic Resources**
- 7. Design Excellence**
- 8. Playing by the Rules**

### **Housing Affordability and Diversity**

Preserve residential character and provide a mix of housing options that maintain the historic economic mix of residents.

- RHN is open to best practices for efficiently designing units of modest area, to support affordability for both first-time buyers and growing families.
- We favor on-site location of affordable housing units over in-lieu fee payment.
- We are supportive of projects utilizing the density/height bonus program in transit corridors to incentivize affordable units, when carefully designed (see Design section).
- Both to increase the supply of available housing and to promote a lively and vibrant neighborhood, we support projects whose plans and marketing seek and encourage owners/residents who wish to be engaged for the long term in the neighborhood and contribute to its well-being. We support the exploration of tax, legal and policy initiatives to disincentivize long-term holding of vacant properties and encourage full-time occupancy.

### **Family-Friendly Policies**

Policies that support the retention and growth of families on Russian Hill extend beyond traditional design and land use to improving local school quality, enhancing and maintaining parks and play areas and a breadth of associated programs.

- RHN favors increasing the proportion of 3-4-bedroom units in new developments to accommodate growing families.
- We recommend that unit mergers be assessed on a case-by-case basis. They may be supported when owner-occupied and designed to be easily converted back to their original configuration.
- We seek to support programs that engage Russian Hill residents in community enhancement activities such as tutoring, after-school programs and apprenticeship opportunities.

## **Thriving Businesses**

Advocate for policies that support existing and legacy businesses, as well as a vibrant mix of resident-serving new establishments.

- RHN supports mixed-use development in commercial districts, with residential use above ground level commercial space.
- We support the conditional use process to evaluate formula retail proposals on a case-by-case basis, rather than blanket formula retail bans in commercial districts.
- We encourage Russian Hill merchants with expiring leases or relocation concerns to seek assistance from our merchant members who may be experienced in lease negotiations.
- Encourage a broad diversity of businesses. Coordinate with the Planning Department to take inventory of the current mix of uses and propose mechanisms to achieve an alternative mix when appropriate.
- Assist with promoting the filling of vacancies. As with housing, we urge the City to disincentivize long-term vacancies, exploring new tax and land use policies to do so.
- We expect landlords of vacant storefronts to keep their property in a well-maintained condition, tidy and attractive, and we seek City enforcement against derelict properties that blight the neighborhood.

## **Welcoming Sidewalks and Public Spaces**

Promote streetscapes that are attractive, free of intrusive equipment, green and pedestrian friendly. Monitor specific issues as they arise, including preservation of historic neighborhood features, installation and maintenance of parklets, and appropriate use of pedestrian sidewalks.

- We support removal of our ugly wooden utility poles, which have no place in a beautiful world class city. Lobby the City to prioritize the undergrounding of utilities and to prepare a concrete plan to do so.
- Preserve and seek ways to enhance and increase open space, parks and street trees in our area.
- Preserve historic neighborhood features such as decorative light fixtures on Union Street. If infeasible, review appropriate replacement fixtures with the neighborhood.
- Encourage the City to more aggressively address illegal dumping.
- Ensure that existing parklets are well-maintained, or removed.
- Work with the City to master plan appropriate locations for any new parklets, to carefully ration and distribute them to maximize neighborhood benefit while minimizing further parking loss.
- Eliminate unused banks of news racks.

## **Responsive Transportation and Parking Policy**

To address the steep slopes on Russian Hill and the mix of ages, work with the City to achieve a balance tailored to our neighborhood among policies that accommodate cars, bicycles and pedestrians. Work with public agencies and officials to mitigate traffic congestion within our boundaries, including the chronic congestion at the crooked section of Lombard Street and adjacent blocks.

- Encourage the maximum on-site parking permitted under current codes for new projects. Include Car Share spaces. Support the addition of appropriate on-site parking for existing residential and commercial properties.
- Recognize that bicycles are not a likely transportation choice for many residents who live on steep hills.
- Support mitigation efforts to reduce the negative impacts on residential areas heavily frequented by tourists and tour businesses.
- Advocate for the Central Subway extension to Russian Hill/North Beach and the northern waterfront, and for extension of the F trolley route through a reactivated Fort Mason tunnel to the Marina.

## **Stewardship of Historic Resources**

Protect and encourage additional designation of historic resources and districts within Russian Hill.

- Consider adding San Francisco landmark designation to existing National Register districts or to selected properties within such districts, and support neighborhood efforts to designate new local and or national historic properties and districts.
- Promote utilization of the Mills Act as an incentive to restore and maintain historic properties.
- Advocate for strict adherence to the Secretary of the Interior Standards and Guidelines for all projects proposed for historic properties and districts.

## **Design Excellence**

Strongly insist that new construction and renovation projects relate to existing scale and character and promote good architectural design. Strive for timeless design, avoiding both fake historicism as well as trendy fashions that may grow stale in the future.

- Rigorously utilize the city's new Urban Design Guidelines in neighborhood commercial streets, tailored as needed to local neighborhood character.
- Adhere to 40-ft height limits where they currently apply.
- Where heights may be increased, insist on mitigations such as upper level setbacks, height transitions between adjacent lower structures, attention to side elevation treatments, and utilization of light wells and rear yard setbacks to enhance midblock access to light and air.

## **Playing by the Rules**

Project sponsors are encouraged to establish an ongoing relationship with RHN and DZLU throughout a project and allow RHN to perform a periodic status review of the project and any changes to the original approved plans that may have occurred during design and construction.

- Improve the flagging of significant changes to a design after review and buy-in by Planning or by RHN, especially where RHN concurrence was sought. Ensure there is appropriate public notification and opportunity for input when such changes are made.
- Assist neighbors in alerting Planning and the Department of Building Inspection when actual construction deviates from permitted plans and advocate for appropriate enforcement measures.
- We insist that contractors maintain safe, tidy and organized construction sites, including the camouflaging of temporary construction toilets, and that the Department of Building Inspection enforce this.
- Support the efforts of City departments to limit construction use of neighborhood street parking for construction vehicles and material staging.
- We discourage contractors from seeking indiscriminate or repeated construction permit extensions and renewals, and ask city support in expediting construction inspections and progress.
- At the same time, we advocate that the City greatly streamline and expedite project reviews and approvals, especially for more routine projects and for seismic upgrades.