



# Sunset Forward Community Needs Assessment

FINDINGS REPORT



San Francisco  
**Planning**



## **DISTRICT 4** Community Needs Assessment



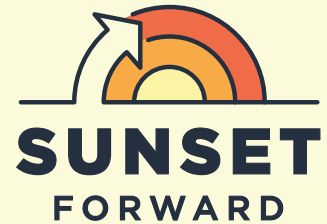
**San Francisco**  
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# Executive Summary



**Sunset Forward** is a community-driven planning process with a mission to stabilize low- and moderate-income families and seniors in the Sunset, enhance community connection and quality of life for all by addressing unmet needs in housing, transportation, and neighborhood businesses and services. The first phase of this project was the Community Needs Assessment, an extensive outreach effort which gathered feedback from those who work, live, play, study, and worship in the Sunset.

From April 2020 through January 2021 Sunset community members participated in virtual town halls and listening sessions, virtual meetings and focus groups, the Sunset Forward Community Needs Assessment Survey (the Survey) and provided input through the [Sunset Forward website](#). We heard from over 2,000 community members through the various virtual events, survey, and website.

The Community Needs Assessment found that many Sunset residents are struggling to afford and secure housing that meets their current and future needs, have limited access to critical neighborhood services, and have seen a continual decline in the health of their neighborhood small businesses and commercial corridors through the years.

## Housing



Housing has profound impacts on who gets to live and work in the Sunset. Housing in the Sunset is unaffordable, especially for low- and middle-income households. A variety of affordable housing options are necessary to meet the different needs of current and future residents in the Sunset. Families are overcrowded, even in single-family homes, but a lack of affordable options limits their ability to move or expand. Seniors need housing that is both affordable

and accessible. Youths and young people are increasingly seeing themselves priced out of their own neighborhood. There is a growing need for services and housing to support the increasing population of people experiencing homelessness in the Sunset.

## Small Businesses and Neighborhood Commercial Corridors



The Sunset community wants their small businesses and neighborhood commercial corridors to be healthy, vibrant, and thriving with a diverse offering of shops and restaurants.

Streets and sidewalks should be clean, safe, and welcoming. Frequent community events and activities can encourage community connection and promote small businesses. Small business owners want greater flexibility in their use of commercial spaces, more affordable commercial rents, and a streamlined permitting process. These factors greatly impact the ability to provide products and services at affordable prices to customers.

## Neighborhood Services



There is a need for a stronger sense of community that has been emphasized by the COVID-19 pandemic. Survey respondents rated community centers and cultural centers as the top desired neighborhood service and crave more community events and opportunities for people to connect across ages and cultures. Even before the pandemic, there was a decline in neighborhood services in the Sunset. There is a need to expand existing programs and provide more services for low-income seniors, families and youth, people experiencing homelessness, and non-English speaking community members. The community highly values their access to parks and open spaces and there is a desire for improved safety, cleanliness, and accessibility.

# Introduction and Background

**Sunset Forward** is a community-driven planning process with a mission to stabilize low- and moderate-income families and seniors in the Sunset District, enhance community connection and quality of life for all by addressing unmet needs in housing, transportation, and neighborhood businesses and services. This effort is a collaboration between the Office of District 4 Supervisor Gordon Mar, the San Francisco Planning Department, the San Francisco County Transportation Authority, the District 4 Youth and Families Network, and the Sunset community.

The Community Needs Assessment is the first phase of Sunset Forward. This extensive outreach effort gathered feedback from those who work, live, play, study, and worship in the Sunset. Through this first phase of outreach, Sunset community members shared their needs and priorities in three areas: housing, small businesses and neighborhood commercial corridors, and neighborhood services. The transportation component of Sunset Forward is led by the San Francisco Transportation Authority through their District 4 Mobility Study. To learn more about this effort, visit the [D4 Mobility Study website](#).

From April 2020 through January 2021, Sunset community members had a variety of options for participating in the first phase of outreach. The project team held 16 virtual listening sessions, 16 virtual meetings and focus groups, and distributed the Sunset Forward Community Needs Assessment Survey (the Survey) through various channels. In addition, San Francisco Planning attended and recorded feedback from 14 Virtual Town Halls hosted by the District 4 Office. Focus groups and listening sessions were facilitated in English and Cantonese, and Cantonese interpretation was made available for all virtual town halls. The Survey

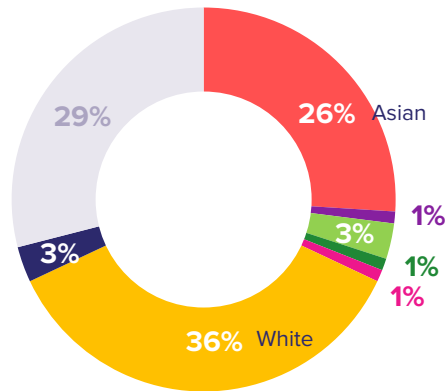
was available in English and Chinese and was open from July 2020 to January 2021. The [Sunset Forward website](#), launched in July, served as a platform where community members could submit questions and comments, complete the Survey, and share their vision for the future of the Sunset.

We heard from approximately 1,600 community members through the various virtual town halls, focus groups, community meetings, and listening sessions.

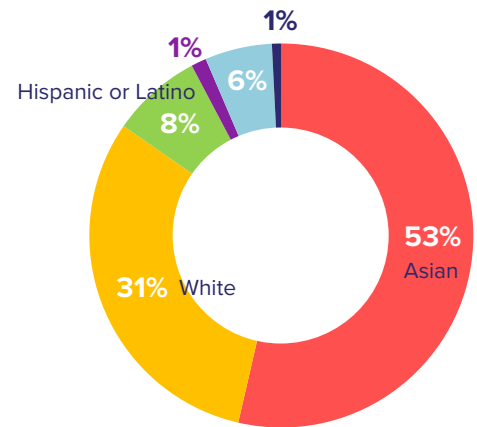
There were 757 total responses to the Community Needs Assessment survey. 91% of respondents either lived, worked, and/or went to school in the Sunset. Survey respondents represented a range of ethnicities, income levels, and age groups that closely matched the District's demographics according to the U.S. Census. The income levels of survey respondents mirrored District trends, with a higher proportion (24%) of respondents reporting household incomes of \$150,000 or more. However, 27% of respondents have household incomes of less than \$100,000. 40% of survey respondents own their homes compared to the 25% that identify as renters, reflecting the District's higher proportion of homeowners (61%) compared to renters (39%). A major difference between District and survey demographics is the underrepresentation of Asian respondents at only 26% compared to 53% of the Sunset's overall population that identify as Asian. Compared to San Francisco overall, the Sunset District uniquely has a higher population of seniors, families with children, multi-generational families, and foreign-born residents. Many of the findings in this report speak directly to the specific needs of these groups. For additional details, including a quantitative summary of the survey results and recorded presentation of the findings, visit the [Sunset Forward website](#).

## What is your ethnicity?

- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native American
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Two or more races
- White
- Other
- Prefer not to respond

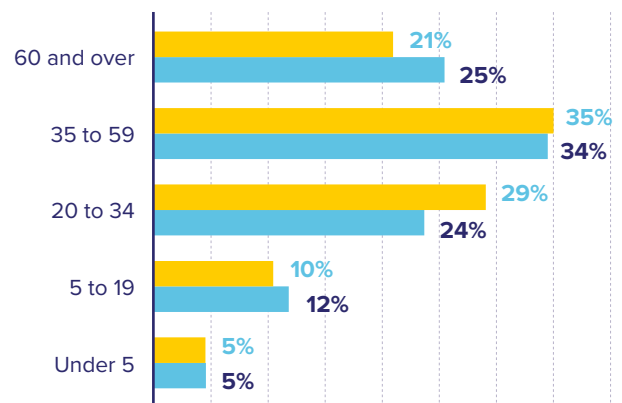
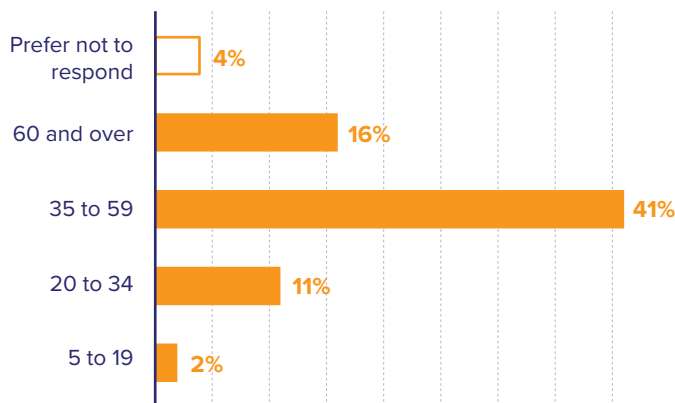


Survey Responses

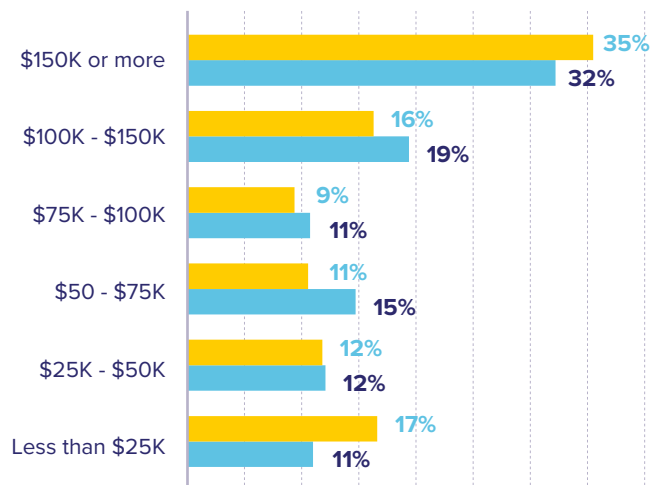
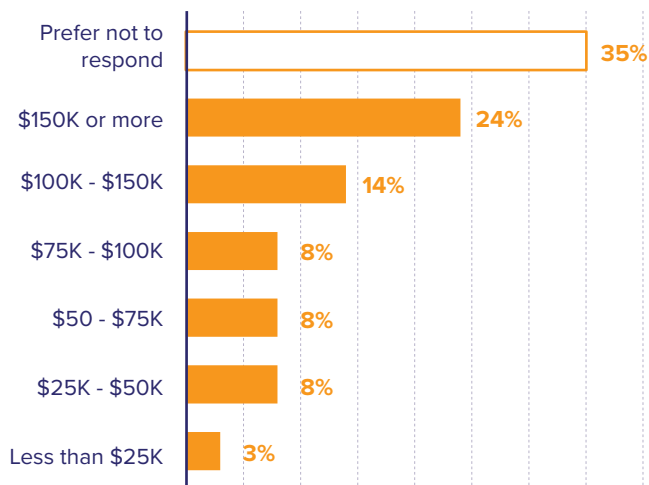


District 4

## What is your age?



## What is your household income?



● Survey Responses ● District 4 ● San Francisco

District 4 Demographics (U.S. Census 2018)





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## KEY FINDINGS

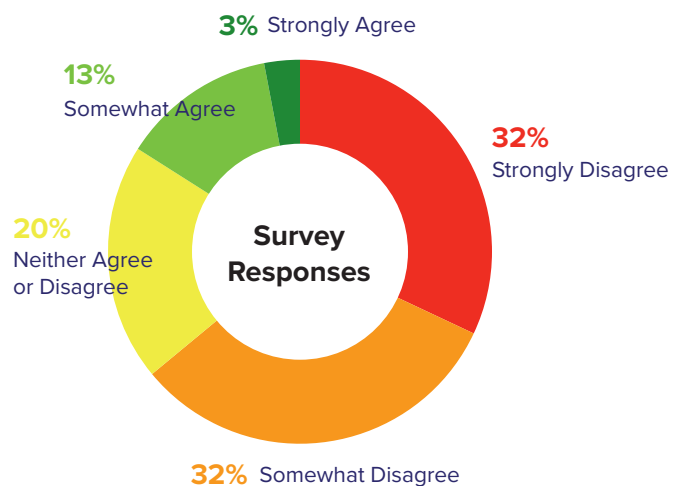
# Housing



### Affordability

The most common sentiment is that housing is increasingly unaffordable for low- and middle-income households in the Sunset. Many residents take pride in the Sunset's history and identity as a predominantly working-class neighborhood, but over the years, families, seniors, and young people have been pushed out of the district and the city altogether. The lack of affordability places limits on people's ability to stay in their neighborhoods and have access to housing that meets their specific needs. Affordability also determines who can live and work in the Sunset, contributing to the community's overall sense of connectedness and identity as a family-friendly neighborhood. Community members also shared the need for more affordable housing for low-income households as well as addressing the overall need for a variety of different types of housing that is affordable to middle income households.

### Housing in the Sunset is affordable...



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**64% of survey respondents say that housing in the Sunset is unaffordable**

## Current Housing Needs

Sunset community members shared varying degrees of housing needs that range from families feeling overcrowded, young people needing more access to affordable studios and 1-bedroom apartments, to elderly homeowners looking to find housing that addresses their accessibility needs. Below is a summary of housing needs by group:

**Seniors** are seeing a lack of affordable senior housing and assisted living options that meet their specific accessibility needs. Senior renters are especially vulnerable to evictions and discrimination by landlords. Many shared experiences of being forced out of their apartments or having rental applications denied in favor of younger renters with higher incomes. The district's size makes access to goods and services a challenge; therefore, there is a need for an increase in small-scale nursing homes located throughout the district in addition to larger senior facilities. Housing for seniors must be planned in coordination with services like paratransit and are located in proximity to commercial areas. Many seniors fear leaving their homes or have limited mobility issues, thus are more vulnerable to social isolation. Large senior housing facilities can feel institutional and impersonal; therefore, seniors need more housing options. Many senior homeowners are "house rich and cash poor" and express feeling "trapped" in their homes. Seniors that are interested in building Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) or renovating their homes see it as a daunting and expensive process.

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**“Unfortunately, people won’t rent to us seniors because they are afraid we will stay too long and they can’t raise the rent.”**

**Families** tended to reply that they found few affordable housing options in the district, especially for low-income families. A relatively high percentage of Sunset families live multi-generationally or with extended family for a variety of



reasons including costs, culture, and childcare. Many families in the Sunset are overcrowded, even in single family homes. Some households with one or two children felt their ability to expand as a family was limited due to housing. COVID-19 has caused more overcrowding as parents work from home, children distance-learn, and extended family move in to help with childcare. Lack of affordability limits the ability to move into a bigger place or expand existing homes. Young couples feel they cannot afford to live on their own or start a family due to high housing costs. Friends, neighbors, and other family members are leaving the Sunset or the City entirely. Families need housing with access to outdoor space or in proximity to parks. Middle income families are continually priced out of the Sunset. Parents are concerned that their kids cannot afford to live in the neighborhood they grew up in.

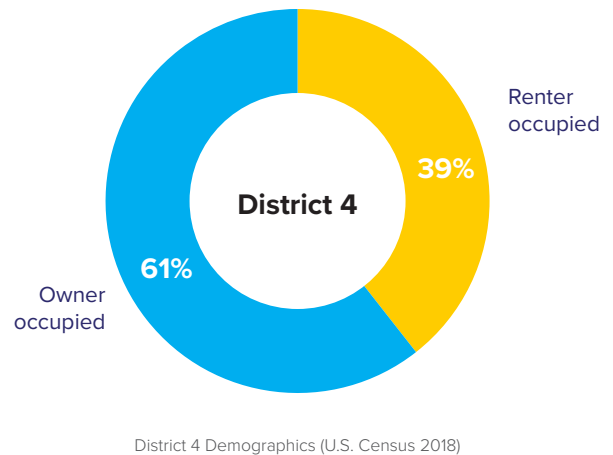
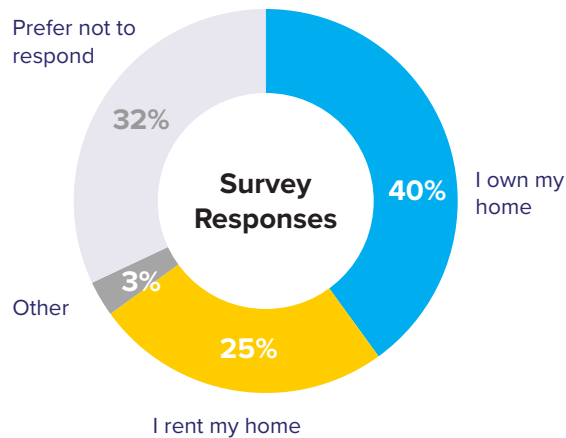
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**“The only thing keeping my family of four in our 1 bed, 1 bath apartment is rent control.”**

**Transitional Aged Youth (TAY) (16-24 years old)** feel there is a tension between their housing needs and the Sunset as a single-family home neighborhood. Many are living in overcrowded situations with roommates in studios or one-bed-



## What is your current housing situation?



room apartments. Students are having to sleep on couches which disrupts their mental health and capacity to learn. Youths are having to help their parents with rent payments. Young people feel like homeownership in the Sunset is out of reach.

**People Experiencing Homelessness** are facing a lack of homeless services and supportive housing in the Sunset. Community members have noticed an increase in people experiencing homelessness in the neighborhoods but feel that there's a lack of resources to help the unhoused community access the services they need.

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**“There just needs to be more housing so we are not limited to undesirable or unsafe conditions.”**

**Renters** feel less secure and stable in their housing compared to homeowners. The survey found that the Sunset has many different types of renters with varying needs (e.g., college students, young professionals, families, seniors, etc.). Many worried about loss of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the inability to pay rent. Renters fear evictions and abuse by landlords and feel insecure

about losing their rent-controlled apartments and being forced to leave the Sunset or the city entirely. Many reported living in properties in need of maintenance and safety improvements but are left neglected by landlords. Renters feel there are no affordable homeownership opportunities in the Sunset.

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**“I’d like to enlarge my home so I can rent rooms out, but I do not have the income to qualify for a loan to do this.”**

**Homeowners** are interested in building Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) but face barriers. They need help navigating the process of building ADUs or bringing unauthorized dwelling units (UDUs) up to code. Homeowners need affordable technical assistance and greater transparency around the permitting process. Some homeowners are concerned their property taxes will increase. Some homeowners with rental units on their properties expressed fear that renting their property would result in undesirable or “bad tenants”. Community members feel that homeownership is increasingly out of reach with the average single-family home priced at over a million dollars.

## Security and Stability

A high proportion of Survey respondents reported feeling secure and stable in their current housing. However, most of those respondents were homeowners that reported having purchased or inherited their homes a long time ago. Renters who said they felt secure and stable attributed that security to paying below market rents or living in rent-controlled buildings. A small percentage of respondents reported living rent-free with family members.

When broken down by income, respondents with low to moderate incomes report feeling less secure and stable compared to respondents with high incomes. Renters generally have lower incomes, making them less secure and stable than homeowners. Many renters are dependent on roommates and landlords who agree not to raise rent or sell their properties. Some survey respondents expressed that they are living in unsafe conditions but are unable to afford to move. Some retired homeowners on fixed incomes worry about their ability to pay their mortgage or a future increase in property taxes.

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**“I’m afraid my landlord could sell the house I rent and I’m unsure about my situation in that case.”**



Photo by SFAC / Cole Anetsberger

## Future Housing Needs

Nearly 40% of respondents say their future housing needs will not be met in their existing homes. A higher proportion of respondents aged 5 to 19 and aged 20 to 34 do not think their future housing needs will be met compared to respondents in other age groups.

Parents shared fears that their kids will not be able to afford to live in the neighborhood they grew up in, having a major impact on the health and future of the Sunset community. Many respondents with families feel that they are outgrowing their current home as they expand, and their children grow. Many parents also rely on grandparents and other extended family members to help with rent and childcare, causing their households to become overcrowded.

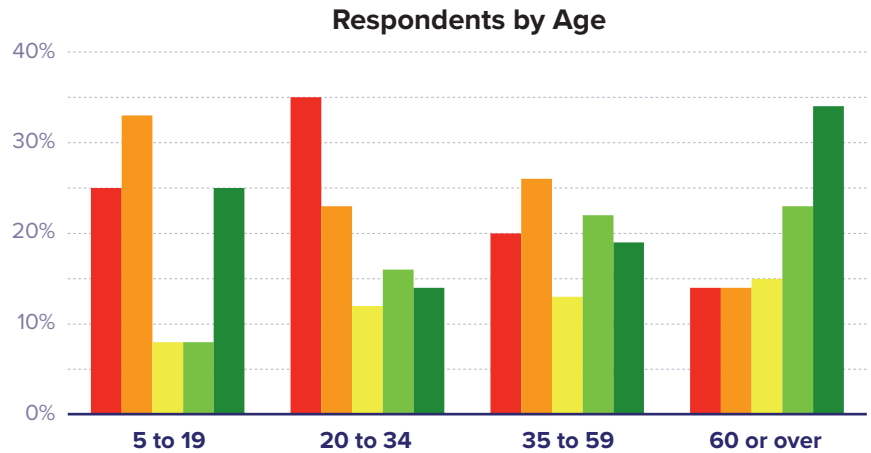
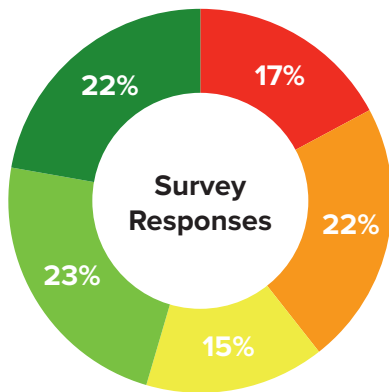
Seniors expressed concern about future mobility issues as well as social isolation in their current homes. Many senior homeowners are interested in renovating or adding an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) but find the process to be daunting and/or expensive.

Many respondents expressed a desire to expand their homes to take care of their aging parents but face similar barriers. Respondents shared the need for a variety of different options for seniors such as small to midsize nursing homes, independent and assisted living facilities, and social housing.

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**Nearly 40% of survey respondents say their future housing needs will not be met in their existing home.**

## The housing that exists in the Sunset will meet my future needs...



● Strongly Agree
 ● Somewhat Agree
 ● Neither Agree or Disagree
 ● Somewhat Disagree
 ● Strongly Disagree



### Impacts from COVID-19 on Housing

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many challenges renters already were facing, such as overcrowding and the fear of eviction. Some respondents also shared that loss of income weighed heavily on their ability to afford to live in the Sunset. Some reported fear of losing their rent-controlled apartment and having to move out of the city entirely.

Respondents with families say that overcrowding has become an increasingly unbearable situation with all adults working from home and children doing distance-learning. Some reported having their adult children move back because of job loss or general inability to afford to live elsewhere. Many respondents shared that the pandemic has forced seniors into further social isolation as many of them fear leaving their homes for safety reasons, or they live too far from the services they need and fear taking public transit.

Respondents say they increasingly witness their family and friends leaving the Sunset. People also reported that since the pandemic began, there has been an increase in break-ins of cars, homes, and garages. Seniors are especially feeling targeted as many of them live alone.



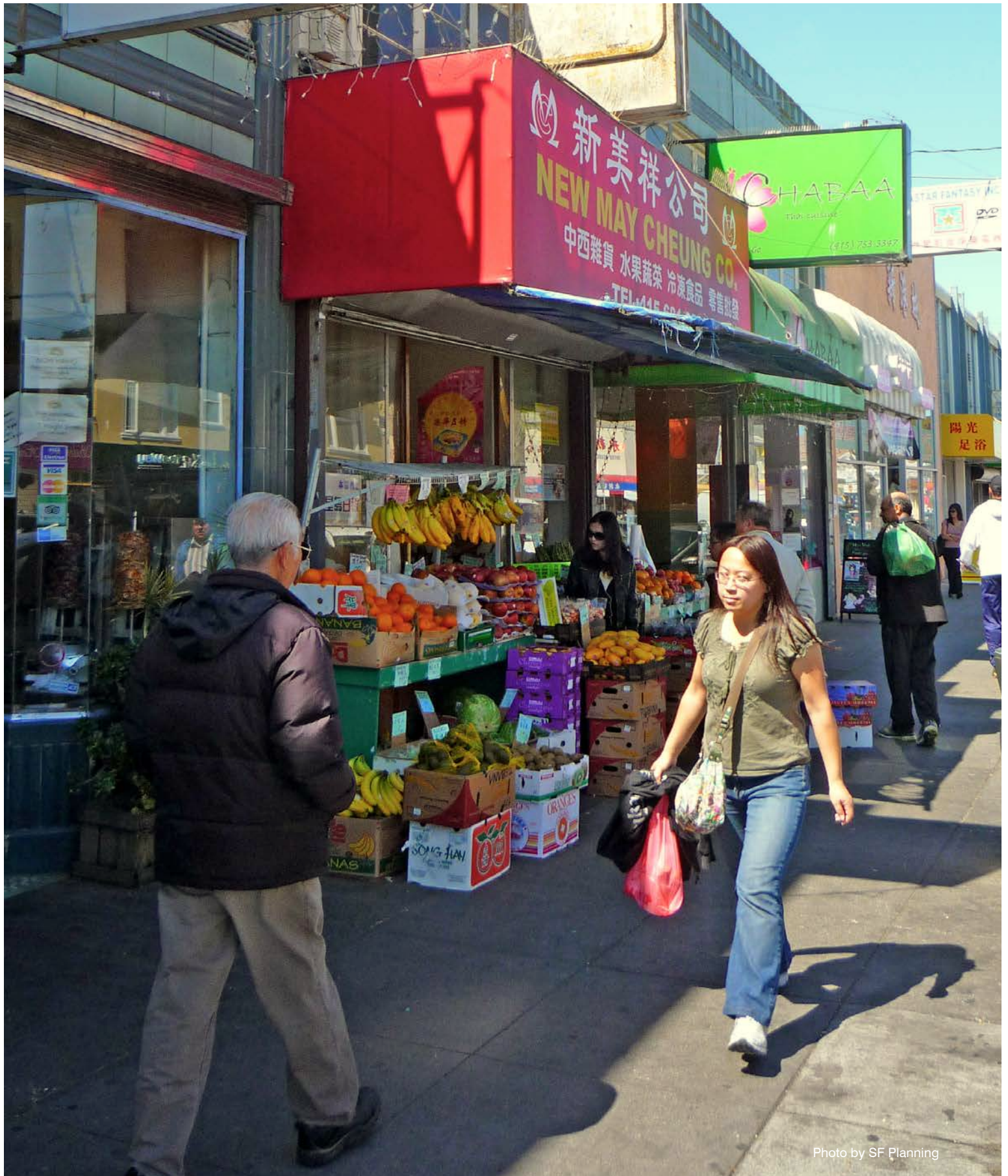


Photo by SF Planning

## KEY FINDINGS



# Small Businesses and Neighborhood Commercial Corridors

Over half of survey respondents say that restaurants and cafes need the most support from city government, followed by grocery stores/small markets, recreational services such as gyms, and personal services such as beauty salons.

Respondents say they would prefer to dine and shop locally if businesses are within walking distance, businesses take appropriate precautions to prevent the spread of COVID, and if streets are more vibrant and pedestrian friendly.

The following themes emerged from focus group conversations and meetings with **small business owners**:

- **Costs are a major burden.** Many small businesses struggle with high and rising rents and some feel that commercial landlords are not sensitive to the current pandemic. Operating costs and the uncertainty of being able to keep their businesses open has placed incredible strain on small business owners. Many reported needing more financial support from the City through grants and subsidies to stay afloat.
- **The permit process is a barrier.** Small business owners shared their experience and frustrations over lack of clarity and transparency, delayed timelines, and extensive approval processes. These have led to loss of income and put them at risk for bankruptcy. Small businesses shared the need for greater flexibility in the permitting process overall and faster approval timelines.
- **Employees cannot afford to live in the Sunset.** Housing affordability limits a small business' ability to hire employees from the community. Many reported that their employees have long commutes, greatly impacting their interest in the job and ability to arrive on time.
- **The Sunset needs a stronger small business community.** Business owners shared the need to have better coordination along the commercial corridors to share information and build community. Many felt there is not one central and reliable source of information around City processes.





Photo by SFAC / Cole Anetsberger



Photo by San Francisco Planning

## “The Irving, Noriega, and Taraval corridors are looking more and more sparse, and it was bad before COVID.”

The following themes emerged from listening sessions, focus group conversations, and open-ended survey questions from the **general public**:

- The health of the Sunset’s neighborhood commercial corridors is important.** Storefront vacancies hurt the entire health of commercial corridors. Businesses need to be located together to increase activity and overall vibrancy of the area. Small businesses need better marketing and community events to promote and draw people to the commercial corridors.
- The Sunset needs greater diversity and affordability of businesses.** Many people shared the desire for a variety of business types on Taraval, the Outer Avenues, and along Ocean Beach. Business types may include small shops, music, and entertainment venues. In addition to encouraging a diversity of businesses, there is also a need for more places to be affordable to young people, seniors, and low-and-middle families in the neighborhood.
- Good street conditions attract customers.** Many people shared that street closures help bring the community together and promote small businesses. Sidewalks and streets should be kept safe and clean. Commercial corridors need to be more pedestrian friendly with better traffic safety measures. The Sunset commercial corridors need more planters and murals by local artists to help beautify the public spaces.
- Customers need access.** People shared the need for more travel options and better access to the Sunset’s commercial corridors. Feedback included: improved public transit, bike parking and bike lanes, improved pedestrian experience and accessibility, improved parking, especially for people with disabilities, availability of neighborhood shuttles for seniors and people with disabilities, electric vehicle charging stations, and more shops and restaurants within walking distance from residential areas.



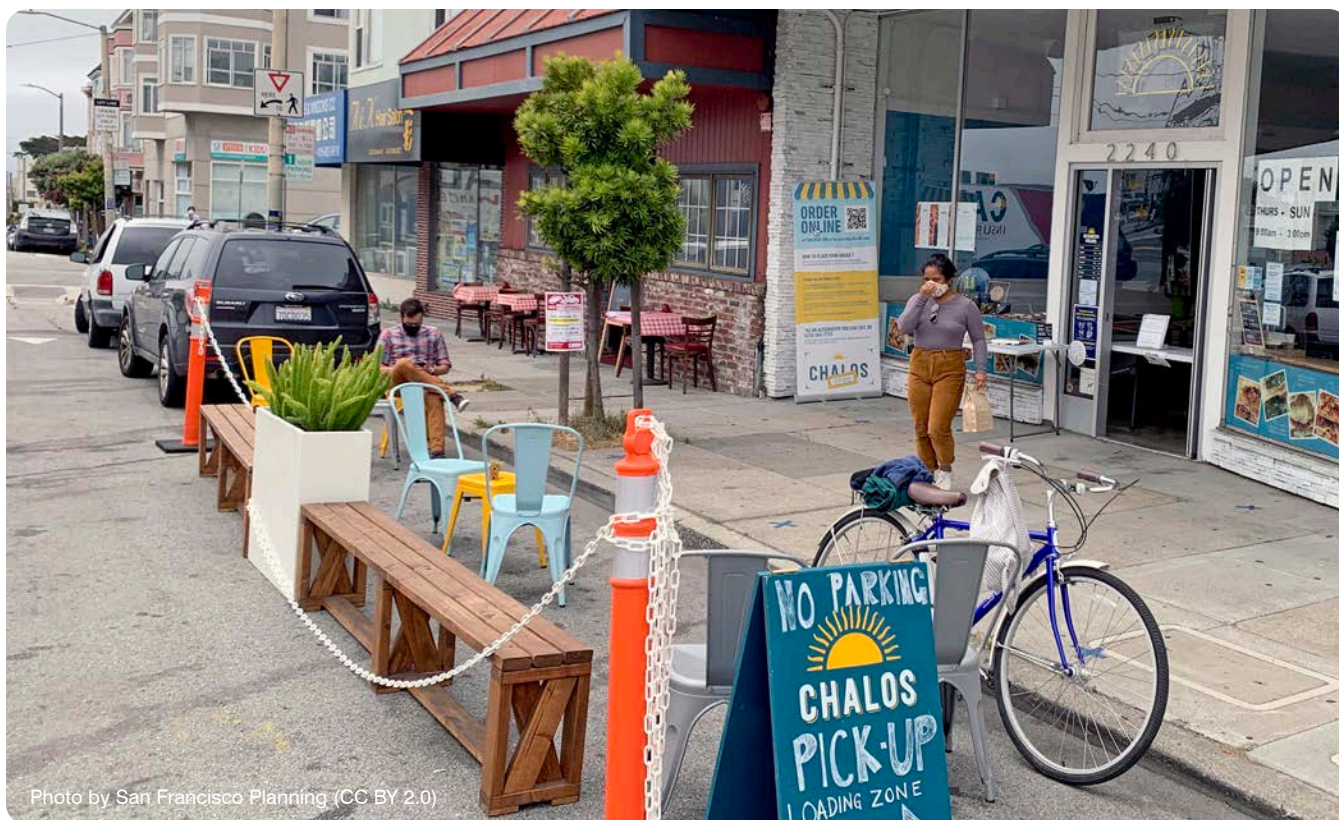


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## Impacts of COVID-19 on Neighborhood Small Businesses and Commercial Corridors

Like the rest of San Francisco, the Sunset District has seen its fair share of closures of small businesses and an increase in storefront vacancies as a result of COVID-19. Many community members expressed their hesitancy to frequent their neighborhood commercial corridors due to fear of catching and spreading COVID-19, especially during the height of the pandemic in Summer and Fall 2020. Both small business owners and community members alike shared gratitude for the City's Shared Spaces program as it allowed businesses to provide services outdoors. Shared Spaces brought much needed activity back to the commercial corridors, but people expressed that they want businesses to take the proper health and safety precautions to keep customers and staff safe.



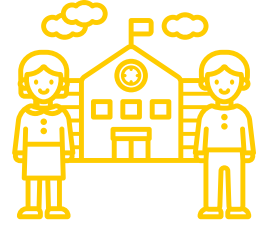


Photo by SFAC / Cole Anetsberger



## KEY FINDINGS

# Neighborhood Services



Survey respondents rated community/recreation centers and cultural centers as their most desired neighborhood services, followed by more public parks and open spaces, youth programs, and grocery stores. The top reasons why respondents are unable to access the services they need in the Sunset include services are closed or have limited hours due to COVID-19, lack of transportation, and services are not available in the Sunset.

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## “We are all craving community right now.”

The following themes emerged from listening sessions, focus group conversations and open-ended survey questions:

- **There is a lack of community connectedness in the Sunset.** The Sunset needs more spaces and opportunities for people to connect across ages and cultures. There is a need for more community events and activities that help parents find support groups, prevent social isolation in seniors, and encourage youth to connect with their peers in the neighborhood. There is also a tension between long-time residents and newcomers that can be addressed through more community building events.
- **There is a need for more access to public parks and open spaces.** Sunset community members really value their parks and open spaces. People shared a desire for more access to clean and safe parks, better accessibility for seniors, more outdoor childcare and summer camps, as well as safety improvements such as lighting in existing parks.
- **Existing programs and neighborhood activities need to be expanded.** Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a decline in programs and activities. People shared the need to expand existing programs especially those that serve low-income seniors, families, and youth in the Sunset.



Photo by SFAC / Cole Anetsberger





Photo by Hoodline / Fiona Lee



Photo by SFAC / Cole Anetsberger

## “Exercise classes geared toward seniors have become unavailable or limited to access.”

### Neighborhood service needs were also identified by group:

**Seniors** were isolated even before COVID-19 and would benefit from greater access to senior centers, programs, goods, and services that are in closer proximity to their homes or more accessible by public transit or paratransit. Seniors lack access to affordable and nutritious food, and local affordable health clinics. Seniors also need access to internet and tech support services.

**Families** are experiencing a shortage of childcare, after-school, and summer programs that are affordable and do not require long waiting lists. Families are craving a sense of community connection with other families in the area. There is generally a lack of youth-oriented spaces and programs available. People shared the need for expanding existing services to the weekend for low-income families, as well as more access to mental health services for parents and children.

### Transitional Aged Youth (TAY) (16-24 years old)

feel isolated from their peers and need more gathering spaces like libraries, affordable cafes, and stores. Other needs include help with finding housing and employment opportunities, SAT and other tutoring services, more TAY-centered community events and activities, access to free or affordable Wi-Fi, and support for non-college bound youth.

**People experiencing homelessness** need better services in the Sunset. Community members observe an increase in people experiencing homelessness in the district but feel there is a lack of services and shelters nearby to refer people to. There is also a need for better access to food, public restrooms, and storage lockers for people to store their belongings throughout the day.

**Renters and homeowners** have differing needs related to better access to support services. Renters would like more access to tenant counseling and help with mediating tenant-landlord issues. Homeowners, especially seniors, expressed support for technical assistance and understanding on how to build ADUs. Low-income seniors and families need support, including language assistance, with the application process for Affordable Housing and Below Market Rate (BMR) homes.



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## “We need support groups and parenting tips around how to raise kids and teenagers in immigrant families.”

**Immigrants** expressed the need for better language access support. This includes access to English lessons, translation services at nonprofits, schools, and daycares, WeChat classes for seniors, offering WeChat as a primary communication tool to reach monolingual households, and ensuring that important community events and announcements are translated in multiple languages.

**Service Providers** shared that a shortage of funding and high commercial rents impacts their ability to expand existing services or create new services to meet the needs. Lack of housing affordability in the Sunset limits their ability to hire high quality and local employees. Childcare and after-school program providers specifically shared the challenge of finding building options that are affordable and near parks. The City’s extensive grant and contracting processes delays funding and poses uncertainty for service providers. Generally, service providers feel they must be regarded as essential workers so that the community services they provide are prioritized when it comes to funding allocation.

## Impacts of COVID-19 on Neighborhood Services.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a great impact on the Sunset community in all areas. As it relates to neighborhood services, people shared:

- School closures caused an increase in the need for access to childcare but there is a lack of availability, limited services, or closure of these types of services.
- Greater reliance on food pantries. Some community members expressed that they had never relied on food pantries prior to the pandemic.
- The closure of public libraries took away a major community resource.
- Many low-income households could not afford internet access.
- There is an increased rise in violence against the Asian American community, greatly impacting Sunset residents.
- Reduced Muni services greatly impacted essential workers and those without cars.
- Many people relied on virtual faith services as their outlet for connection.
- Senior services were cut significantly, and many seniors could only access food through these programs.
- There is a pronounced need for mental health services.
- People would like better access to COVID-19 testing centers in the Sunset.



### NEXT STEPS

The Planning Department, D4 Youth and Families Network, and Office of the District 4 Supervisor will use feedback gathered through this Community Needs Assessment to develop a set of draft strategies to address the community's needs and priorities. Draft strategies will be categorized into three main topics: housing, small businesses and neighborhood commercial corridors, and neighborhood services.

In Summer 2021, the project team will present and solicit feedback on the draft strategies via a series of virtual events and an online survey. Feedback will be used to develop a set of final Sunset Forward Neighborhood Strategies, to be tentatively released in early Winter 2022.

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