



2022 Was A Big Year for the Tenderloin

Years of strategic community-building and organizing led to a substantial City response when community needs escalated with the COVID pandemic, and deaths and overdoses due to an increased prevalence of fentanyl dealing.

Mayor Breed declared an unprecedented **State of Emergency** on December 17, 2021, with the consequent mobilization of various city agencies through the Tenderloin Emergency Initiative (TEI), followed by a community planning effort and the allocation of \$4 million in direct investments to the neighborhood. The Tenderloin community has been and will continue to be the essential driver guiding City investments and strategies.

The community has grappled with a multitude of challenges for decades. A tipping point for decision makers came after two years of deterioration exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, involving a violent incident between a young girl and an individual with mental illness. This incident shed light on the neighborhood's persistent issues, including homelessness, substance use disorder, overdoses, and mental health crises. The high concentration of children and an open-air drug market intensified urgency for a collective response. Community advocates and leaders, including Arab and Latine mothers, among others, drafted an open letter urging the city to address the longstanding quality-of-life problems and suffering in the neighborhood. In response, Mayor Breed declared a State of Emergency for the neighborhood and announced the three-phased TEI.



Under the leadership of the Department of Emergency Management, the first two phases (assessment of conditions and crisis operations) of the TEI involved a coordinated effort among various city agencies, including Fire, Police, Public Health, Human Rights Commission, Public Works, and the Department of Homelessness & Supportive Housing. These agencies collaborated on a regular basis, holding weekly and daily meetings. The primary focus was to identify hotspots (chop shops, overflow of tents blocking pathways, dumping sites) , tackle illicit street activities, find solutions for street-related issues, and connect unhoused populations with essential resources.

While some Tenderloin residents have felt energized by street operations and experienced improved safety and cleanliness on the streets, moving or collecting personal belongings from walkways is a point of contention in the neighborhood. In fall 2022, the ACLU and Coalition on Homelessness filed a suit against the city challenging the constitutionality of these types of interventions. The suit is still active, and the courts have placed an injunction on enforcing laws related to people sitting or lying on the streets with certain exceptions. The eventual outcome of this lawsuit could shape the function and operations of citywide street teams which work in partnership with the Department of Public Health, Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing, Department of Emergency Management, the Fire Department, and the Police Department.

In addition to tactical operations, partner agencies like the Human Rights Commission supported coordination of robust public outreach, engagement, and feedback which directly shaped city efforts during the crisis operations phase of the Tenderloin Emergency Initiative.

A notable aspect of this phase was the establishment of the **Tenderloin Center**, which served individuals living through substance abuse and other adversities. As a temporary intervention, the center offered immediate support and facilitated transitions into appropriate healthcare settings and connections to housing. The lasting impact of the crisis response phase of the State of Emergency **is still being debated**. Locally, some believe projects like the Tenderloin Center **were essential** while others believe that very **little sustainable change** came of the emergency declaration.

The sustained operations on the streets brought increased dedication of outreach and engagement teams to support unhoused residents. In addition, the organizing of Tenderloin small businesses and merchants successfully pushed for **increased policing** on Tenderloin streets to address open-air drug dealing and mitigate impacts to small businesses. Differing opinions exist in the Tenderloin regarding increased police presence, with concerns about impact on unhoused residents. Some welcome increased policing, aware of the impact of open-air drug dealing on safety for all residents and small businesses. Particularly, the recent inclusion of the **National Guard and California Highway Patrol** in addressing open-air drug dealing has sparked discussions about the implications of police intervention and intergovernmental coordination within the neighborhood.

From Emergency Response to Community Planning

As the TEI transitioned from crisis response operations to sustained operations over the course of the year, SF Planning was designated as the lead agency responsible for community planning and for formulating strategies for investment of the Mayor approved \$4 million for community projects. In June 2022, the Mayor approved \$4 million for community projects in the Tenderloin, an unprecedented funding for community investments. SF Planning was tasked with formulating strategies and programming these funds. This synergy came on the heels of years of collaboration between SF Planning and the Tenderloin community.



Most notably, SF Planning supported a 2021 community-led survey conducted in partnership with a number of community organizations and resident groups. The survey offered specific, community-sourced interventions about arts and culture, economic development, environmental justice, transportation, community safety and pedestrian safety.

Despite differing perspectives, the community has worked hard to define collective priorities. Priorities identified in the survey and years of collaboration between Planning and community resident groups and organizations framed the development of innovative approaches including a **participatory budgeting process**. Participatory budgeting in the city had only been conducted at smaller scales in San Francisco, never at the level of political complexity represented by Tenderloin. For the Planning Department and the neighborhood, participatory budgeting was uncharted territory yet aligned with the community vision. By centering the community in the process, the collaborative efforts between the city and the community resulted in an unprecedented number of nearly 1,400 Tenderloin residents, including youth, and workers participating in the voting, surpassing participation rates in previous cases.

The participatory budget process yielded valuable lessons ranging from ensuring equitable dissemination of voting information and providing comprehensive guidelines for voter outreach to engaging in an extended outreach effort. The Planning Department collaborated with community partners to establish conveniently located voting stations within the neighborhood and actively participated in a diverse array of community events throughout the two-week voting period. Additionally, the Department developed a multilingual voting guide and utilized an online tool, Stanford PB, specifically designed for participatory budgeting, ensuring multilingual accessibility to the voting platform.



The process resulted in the **prioritization of 21 projects** by the residents and workers of the Tenderloin to enhance public spaces, promote cultural events, support youth, and enhance wellness and access to essential needs.

The Department also facilitated a Community Stakeholder Group (CSG) in 2022 as a vehicle to translate organized community power into an enhanced partnership between the City and the Tenderloin neighborhood. Through extensive outreach efforts, residents from various backgrounds, encompassing Black, Asian American (Filipino, Chinese, Vietnamese), Arab, and Latine communities, as well as cultural and community-based organizations, actively participated. The open



and diverse group played an integral role in the participatory budget process by actively sharing and soliciting project ideas from their respective communities, resulting in a wide range of community-sponsored projects.

The CSG has been on hiatus since January 2023 after requests from key stakeholders for a collaborative rethinking of the purpose and structure of a community leadership group. While the first iteration of the CSG focused on broad, resident-focused community involvement, there were challenges to establishing it as unified neighborhood voice able to sustainably advocate for resource investments. The open-ended structure proved ineffective in preserving and cultivating institutional knowledge essential for advancing a unified voice for effective advocacy. The goal of rethinking the CSG is to develop an intentional, sustainable, and diverse community leadership group which advances community leadership capacity in the Tenderloin.

Community Remains at the Center of the Work

2022 offered valuable insights for the city and the Tenderloin community: the significance of harnessing the strength of an empowered community to bring about unprecedented transformations; the need for fostering collaborative and iterative reflection throughout the design and implementation of initiatives such as the participatory budgeting process.



Photograph courtesy of Tenderloin Community Benefit District



The architects, instigators, and champions of the watershed year are the residents and community-serving organizations of the Tenderloin itself. Community organizing within the Tenderloin is the driving force that demanded and directed long-needed resources in the neighborhood. The Tenderloin community efforts are strengthening the City's new policies and strategies to directly address historic racial and social disparities.



Under the **Centering Planning on Racial & Social Equity resolutions** adopted by the Planning Commission and Historic Preservation Commission in 2020, the Planning Department established the Community Equity Division. The Division's directive is to center its work program and resource allocation on racial and social equity, and to implement equitable systems and processes internally and in the Department's work citywide. The Tenderloin work is housed in the Community Equity Division uniquely

with a dedicated team to collaborate with the neighborhood's various communities to deliver comprehensive and equitable outcomes.

As community projects from the participatory budgeting process begin to materialize, the Tenderloin team and the Community Equity Division remain steadfast in their commitment to implementation, facilitating change in the Tenderloin fostering collaborative partnerships with resident groups and community organizations, and centering community self-determination in the Tenderloin. The valuable lessons learned from the dynamic year of 2022 in the Tenderloin, as well as from the Division's equity-driven work in community and economic development and affordable housing, will continue to shape the ongoing work of enacting change in one of the most creative and resilient communities in the city.

For more info on the Tenderloin Community Action Plan, visit:

<https://sfplanning.org/project/tenderloin-community-action-plan>



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