

# Larkin Revitalization (DRAFT)

## Context

Larkin Street, especially Little Saigon, emerged as a cultural center and commercial corridor in the Tenderloin for Southeast Asian community thanks to their decades of community organizing and community development. After their arrival in the Tenderloin starting in the 1970s, leaders of the Southeast Asian community self-organized to serve these new immigrants. Organizations such as Southeast Asian Community Center and Vietnamese Youth Development Center (now SEADC) were instrumental in supporting the stabilization of the immigrant families and children in a new environment. Slowly these newcomers replaced many empty storefronts with neighborhood shops and restaurants. By early 2000, eighty percent of the businesses on these two blocks were owned by Vietnamese Americans (SF Chronicle, 2004), ranging from personal services, restaurants, and cafes to profession services. In 2003, the leaders of the Southeast Asian community worked with the elected officials to establish the “Little Saigon District”, recognizing the district’s importance as a Southeast Asiatic cultural and community center in the Tenderloin and in San Francisco.

Over the years, while Larkin Street remained a Southeast Asian culture center, it increasingly represented the diversity of the Tenderloin, with several Arab, Chinese, Latino entrepreneurs also contributing to the vibrancy of the corridor. However, once a bustling major commercial corridor, Larkin Street now has a very different scene. According to SF Planning’s survey, vacant storefronts are at 20 percent of total businesses on Larkin Street, including what was left behind by the beloved restaurant Turtle Tower. The planned exit of Lapats, the beloved Thai eatery, is yet another example of a Southeast Asian owned business vacating the district. The loss of businesses and foot traffic on Larkin Street has contributed to the challenging economic recovery of the neighborhood: sales tax revenues from the Tenderloin are still down 60 percent in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2023 compared to the same quarter in 2019, the worst of all neighborhoods in San Francisco. Among the businesses who are surviving, many experience quality of life related issues such as vandalism, graffiti and encampments. To keep businesses afloat, many businesses have struggled to drastically cut their costs by reducing the number of employees to the nuclear family or decreasing opening hours from 7 days a week to appointments only. Still, many others have insufficient funds to make much needed improvements or to update their equipment. Larkin Street is at a pivotal point where the City and the community must invest in the corridor to prevent the closure of long-term small businesses on its main economic corridor.

## Tenderloin Small Business Support

The Office of Workforce and Economic Development (OEWD) and its community partners, primarily TLCDB, have been offering support to small businesses and nonprofit community organizations to strengthen the economic vitality of the neighborhood. Support is provided through a range of initiatives, including technical assistance, lease negotiations, grants and loans, block parties, street events, and other types of cultural events offered by CBO partners.

Small Business support is also identified as a strategic priority by Tenderloin community residents as part of the Tenderloin Community Action Planning (TCAP) process led by the San Francisco Planning Department. TCAP represented a milestone in the Tenderloin community's long-standing history of activism and advocacy. Mayor Breed's approval of \$4 million in 2022 brought unprecedented city resources to the Tenderloin. San Francisco Planning led a first-of-its-kind participatory budgeting process to program these funds with 1,400 residents and workers voting on community-sponsored proposal. As a result, \$380,000 was dedicated to small business support.

Subsequently, SF Planning and OEWD partnered with small business stakeholders, including TLCBD, TNDC, SEACC, and New Community Leadership Foundation (NCLF). Through a series of workshops, they helped shape small business priorities. In addition, the team participated in a well-attended Tenderloin Business Coalition event and conducted door to door interviews with business owners, especially immigrant business owners with limited English proficiency. Building upon the community voice, the stakeholder group asked for a focused investment for a more significant collective impact, and identified Larkin Street as a corridor that needs this focused investment to once again serve as a vibrant corridor for the TL.

### **Current City-funded Initiatives underway on Larkin Street**

Current city-funded projects could be categorized in the following categories:

- Small business Grants: Business Training Grant, SF Shines, and New Storefronts Grant *Grants from SF Planning and OEWD to support existing businesses with specialized business training, and grants for equipment and storefront improvements, for supporting new entrepreneurs to fill vacancies on Larkin Street (#5 on Map).*
- Public space improvements *Improve public space to create an inviting and welcoming environment for residents and visitors. Examples include Larkin Street Canopy Project (#4) and Lower Larkin Gates Project (#7).*
- Public space and cultural activations *Activate public space including alleys and streets by offering music and cultural experiences to residents and visitors. Examples include First Thursday Art Walk (#1), The Compton's Café Play & Block Party (#2), Mrytle Alley and Dodge Alley activations (#3 and #8), and TL Tet Festival (#6).*
- MTA Larkin Street quick build project to improve traffic and pedestrian safety (#9)

In addition, supplementary efforts to enhance street conditions and improve public safety are pivotal for safeguarding the vitality of the corridor.

- Street ambassadors and cleaning: community ambassadors have also expanded their coverage on both the west and east side of Larkin Street from Turk Street to Geary Boulevard.

## **Larkin Revitalization**

The Larkin Street corridor is struggling with its post-pandemic recovery, with higher vacancy rate and more challenged street conditions than many other San Francisco neighborhood corridors, however, the story of Larkin Street and Little Saigon shows that the current conditions are not unchangeable. It highlights the importance and necessity of strong commitment from within the community, attention from the City, coupled with cultural experiential offerings provided by community-based organizations to create a successful vibrant neighborhood center.

It's crucial to strengthen community capacity to empower Southeast Asian community residents and community-based organizations like SEACC and SEADC to collaborate and lead the charge toward a culturally rich and economically vibrant corridor. It is also vital to ensure coordination among community-led initiatives and city agencies for strategic resource deployment to deliver a more impactful collective impact.

### **Next steps**

SF Planning in partnership with OEWD is engaging in conversations within the City and community stakeholders to seek further support and resources for Larkin Revitalization.

For our agency partners we would like to know:

- What existing resources do you offer on or for Larkin Street that could benefit from coordination and improved impact to support revitalization and sustained vibrancy?
- How long could you commit to these resources?
- Who is a point of contact we can coordinate our messaging to the public with?

For community partners:

- What partnership capacities could you bring to support Larkin revitalization?
- How would a coordinated effort support improve the impact or scale of your cultural events and activities?

# Larkin Street Initiatives (DRAFT)

Larkin Street has been an integral part of the Tenderloin and San Francisco's cultural and economic fabric. Under Tenderloin Community Action Planning (TCAP), it was identified by community partners as a focus for city agencies' collaborative small business support work. The Office of Economic and Workforce Development and SF Planning Department have been coordinating their investments towards Larkin Street to revitalize this important commercial corridor.



## First Thursday Art Walk

A community-led monthly event hosted by gallery owners, artists' studios, and other businesses and event spaces (map only shown locations on Larkin Street).

Multiple Locations  
Timeline: Year-long



## The Compton's Cafeteria Riot Play & Block Party

Free community preview nights for The Compton's Cafeteria Riot play, as well as outdoor opening celebration/block party.

835 Larkin Street  
Timeline: Summer 2024



## Barklet + Myrtle Alley Activation

Support the current Barklet dog park on Myrtle Alley and bring some special dog-themed events to the alley.

Myrtle Street  
Timeline: Spring-Summer 2024



## Larkin St Green Canopy

Install 39 planters with trees along Larkin Street between Eddy and O'Farrell, as well as 120 lanterns. New string lights will be installed over Willow and Olive Streets.

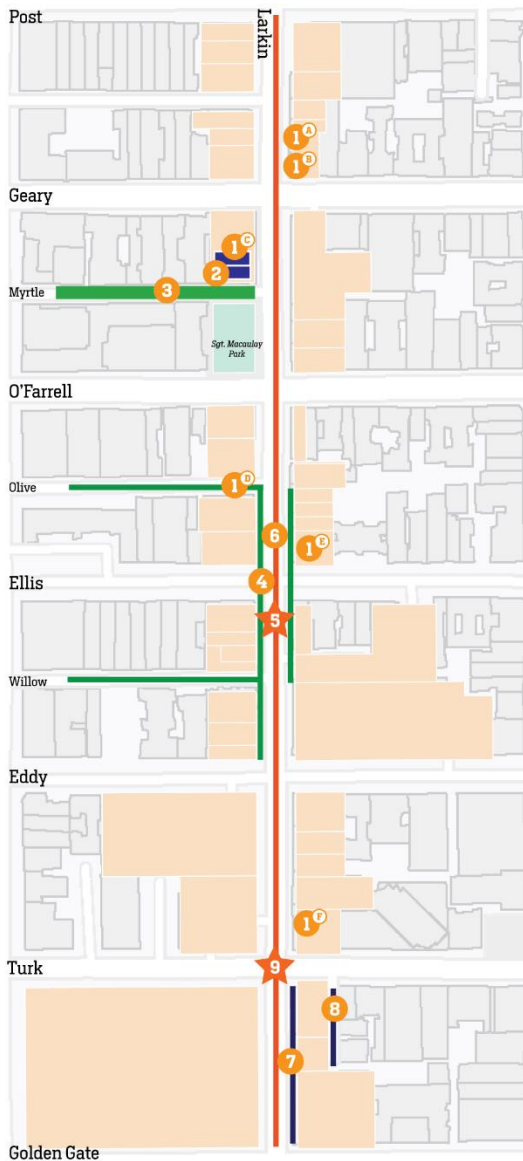
Little Saigon  
Timeline: Spring-Summer 2024



## TCAP Small Business Support Grant

Collaborating with OEWD to support existing businesses with business trainings, storefront improvements grant. Also working to fill vacancies on Larkin street with new businesses.

Larkin Street  
Timeline: Spring-Fall 2024



## Tenderloin Tet Festival

Vietnamese Spring Festival celebration with street activations at Little Saigon.

Little Saigon  
Timeline: February 2024



## Lower Larkin Decorative Gates Pilot

Decorative security gates for 3 businesses on 400 block Larkin as a pilot project.

418, 422, 426 Larkin Street  
Timeline: Summer 2024



## Dodge Alley Monthly Socials

6 monthly activations at Dodge alley starting Jan 2024, led by Shovel's Bar & Grill.

Dodge Alley  
Timeline: Spring-Summer 2024



## SFMTA Larkin Street Quick Build

Street safety improvements on Larkin Street from Market Street to Sutter Street. Planning/outreach this summer, with construction planned for early 2025.

Larkin Street  
Timeline: Summer 2024 - Spring 2025

