

Community Equity Council Meeting

July 26, 2022 @ La Cocina Marketplace

Facilitator: Tiffany & Will

Councilmembers In Person: Raquel, Mahsa, Lara, Anni, Del, Majeid, Mary

Staff: Miriam Chion, Claudia Flores, Oscar Grande, Lauren Hiller

1. Opening

Tiffany and William opened the meeting by welcoming councilmembers to the La Cocina Marketplace. La Cocina is a woman-owned, San Francisco-based food incubator that supports woman-owned small businesses. The Marketplace is a food hall that hosts several of their businesses, including Tiffany's Boug Cali restaurant. The facilitators highlighted that the La Cocina Marketplace is a representation of San Francisco – many cultures and people coming together to create an active and unique space.

The meeting began with a musical performance by Marina Lavalle (voice) and Daniel Zamalloa (guitar) who performed several Peruvian and Latin American pieces. Will read a land acknowledgement, reminding all that we are on unceded Ramaytush Ohlone land.

2. Neighborhood Economic Vitality

Miriam Chion began the discussion on neighborhood economic vitality by highlighting current economic and business trends and identifying existing city strategies to support small businesses. San Francisco's economic landscape has changed substantially since the beginning of the pandemic. San Francisco led the nation in the closure of businesses, which already hit small businesses and businesses owned by people of color the hardest. 2.5 years after the beginning of the pandemic, restaurants, entertainment, and art businesses had still not recovered and a majority of downtown office space remains empty. While downtown businesses were among the hardest hit, many businesses located in surrounding neighborhoods have returned to nearly pre-pandemic levels.

Tiffany and Will took a moment to share the story of their own organizations. Tiffany runs Boug Cali, a California creole restaurant she started through La Cocina's incubator program. Boug Cali shows off the unique Black California culture she grew up in and she serves as a point of representation for her community. While her business is now financially successful, she struggled to secure loans from traditional financial institutions at its inception. She also co-founded SF Black Wallstreet to advocate for other Black small businesses, especially on the 3rd Street corridor in the Bayview.

Will started Clecha, a nonprofit small business assistance center, by helping members of the Mission community start their own business while standing in lines for the food bank. Clecha helps small business owners access what affluent people already have access to. Since Clecha's inception, they've helped incorporate over 100 LLCs, negotiate over 100 leases for small businesses, and connected small business owners to millions in grants. The biggest struggle for his clients is access to funding and navigating the City's systems. In addition to one-on-one support, Will aims to make systemic changes for small businesses in the City.

The Equity Council’s discussion following this grounding featured several major themes:

Communities want to work together and learn from one another – Councilmembers stressed the importance of working together across communities. The City’s limited funding for vulnerable communities and competitive grant process sometimes places communities against one another. Several councilmembers expressed their appreciation for the Equity Council’s dialogue space in facilitating cooperation between them. Council members shared their own efforts, challenges, and accomplishments in their communities reflecting on Clecha and Boug Cali’s experiences. One councilmember spoke directly about Tiffany’s story about establishing Boug Cali and expressed admiration and support for the work she’s accomplished and her role as an inspiration to her community. Councilmembers hoped to see the collaboration reproduced in other City departments and within their own communities.

Locally owned small businesses are the soul of San Francisco – Councilmembers opened the space by highlighting that the La Cocina Marketplace – a food hall of women and people of color-owned businesses – is a representation of San Francisco. While data have reported a decline in economic activity and an increase in vacancies around the Financial District and Union Square, many Cultural Districts have returned to pre-pandemic activity levels and revenue. One councilmember observed that visitors and residents have turned to cultural activities, food and entertainment in communities of color instead of downtown. This dovetails with assertions councilmembers made that they are NOT an opportunity to diversify brands or to be tokenized. They are not only valuable assets, but their communities comprise the vibrant fabric of the city and should be treated as such.

Downtown has excluded communities of color and marginalized communities – Councilmembers feel that downtown – a broad geography that can include everything from the Financial District to SoMa – has excluded low-income and people of color. In particular, the Financial District hasn’t reflected the cultural resources of our diverse San Francisco communities. Some Council members expressed that this exclusion has been facilitated by the Planning Department’s actions. During the first dotcom boom in the late 1990s, one councilmember spoke about the inaction of the Planning Department, who ineffectively enforced zoning code and allowed for the illegal flourishing of tech offices in the SoMa. More recently, the City has allowed tech offices that have opened in the last decade to open in-building cafeterias that hire non-local contractors. This has contributed to the disappearance of small businesses downtown.

Downtown is also a site of opportunity – Councilmembers brought up the Mayor’s recent Downtown Recovery Plan, which will dedicate \$9.5 million in funding to support programming, public space improvements, and additional staff for downtown. Many shared a frustration with the immense scale of funding invested into a neighborhood that does not reflect communities of color in San Francisco, especially when Cultural Districts and communities of color have struggled to secure investments in their own neighborhoods. But some councilmembers argued that this funding and renewed attention to downtown could be an opportunity to reimagine the neighborhood for communities of color. In order to achieve this vision, however, marginalized communities and communities of color must shape the rebuilding of downtown from the beginning. As one councilmember stressed, communities should be holding the sketching pencil at the onset and then telling developers how they can support that vision. The city and developers should not approach communities of color after plans have been drawn and asking them, “where do you see yourself fitting in?”

Commented [F(1): There were a lot of small businesses downtown. I think the white collar jobs are definitely less accessible to communities of color and low-income folks but not necessarily small businesses. I might suggest rephrasing to:

Council members feel that downtown has excluded.... or

Downtown has not reflected... or

Downtown lacks a sense of inclusion for communities of color.... or

Many downtown jobs and businesses are not accessible to communities of color and marginalized communities

Commented [F(2): @Chion, Miriam (CPC) do you think this should be stated this way on a public summary? for people who know him, it is calling someone out. I think it might be better to say "the planning department"?

Commented [F(3): I changed this because the city cannot obligate all hiring to be local hiring

3. Updates

Oral Her/Histories

Oscar Grande shared several updates on the Oral Her/Histories project. Processing of the video product continues as staff and a subcommittee of councilmembers plan for a series of public launch events in the fall. This may include a large launch event at City Hall or the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, followed by a series of community viewing events at various neighborhood sites.

4. Closing

Will and Tiffany closed the meeting and reminded councilmembers that the next Equity Council meeting will take place on August 23, 2022 from 4-6pm. Councilmembers expressed their gratitude to the La Cocina Marketplace staff and Tiffany for hosting them.