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Rachel Brahinsky

Miriam Chion

Lisa Feldstein

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Rachel Brahinsky
University of San Francisco
Miriam Chion
Association of Bay Area Governments
Lisa M. Feldstein
University of California, Berkeley

Abstract

This paper builds on a dialogue between barrio planners and municipal planners on spatial and economic changes in San Francisco's Mission District. The Mission is a predominantly Latino neighborhood with vibrant streets that have reflected and been transformed by the investments and displacement of recent decades. Though the Mission has seen tremendous upheaval with the influx of new capital and communities, this paper contends that efforts of community members shaped the development of the neighborhood with street-level planning expertise. We find that an attempt by community members to define their own development proposals and engage in land use decisions– rather than waiting to react to developer-designed proposals– created new possibilities for cultural and economic resiliency. Through skillful navigation of the economic crisis, convergence of multiple voices, and a sustainable grassroots planning process, community-led urban planning carved out public space for non-expert voices to be heard. Situated at the convergence of multiple processes, the People's Plan and Pueblote are examples of the transformations of plans and regulations to address community needs.

Key words: participatory governance, gentrification, community mobilization, community planning, urban planning, just city

Take a walk with us through San Francisco's Mission District at the end of the 'oughts, and you're likely to feel pulled in two directions. On the one hand, there are working-class moms with strollers, and shopping bags bursting with *platanos*[1] and *yucca*[2]. On the other hand, peeking out between the *bodegas*[3] and *taquerias*[4] of this once Latino-dominated community is what we call the New Mission. Represented by new shiny eateries and glass-fronted galleries, the New Mission is a cultural and economic force that took hold during the dot-com boom of the 1990s, and continues to expand – with new high-end businesses appearing, popcorn-like, all over the neighborhood. The sight of these new places reminds the sharp observer of the larger economic and spatial transformation that has forced thousands of families, artists and community workers to leave the city over the last decade as part of a wholesale reorganization of urban life (Beitel 2003; Walker 2006).

A dramatic shift was visible in the late 1990s, when a dot-com flush economy flooded the neighborhood, changing it forever in an instant. There was a lull as the 2000-01 economic crash sucked the city dry of tourist and internet-economy dollars. Yet, even as the rest of the San Francisco Bay Area, the nation – and indeed world – reeled with the economic crash, parts of the city, including the Mission District, quietly continued to gentrify. In 2011, as the number of Bay Area foreclosures climbed and the economy catalyzed thousands to Occupy Wall Street and downtowns everywhere, a batch of new art galleries, decked out with New Economy glitz – and predominantly

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[1] *Platano*: Spanish for plantain, a banana-like fruit that is generally eaten cooked.
[2] *Yucca*: A starchy, tuberous root; also known as manioc or cassava.
[3] *Bodega*: A small grocery store.
[4] *Taqueria*: An inexpensive restaurant serving tacos, burritos, and other Mexican food.

white patrons – populated the Mission while the *Wall Street Journal* reported that neighborhood median home prices had grown forty-four percent (Keates & Fowler 2011).

And yet, along a few core blocks, *taquerias* with $4 meals still outnumber cafes with hand-poured $4 cups of coffee. The eateries and galleries for the new elite of San Francisco sit somewhat uneasily, even now, in the multi-ethnic mixture of rich and poor that is still recognizably a Latino place. In spite of the overflowing of "web 2.0" buses into the area – private shuttles that cart Apple and Google employees to Silicon Valley each day – the remnant working class community of color, against all odds, has remained vibrant. Taco trucks, pan-Latin restaurants, cultural festivals and murals, and a string of budget stores enable working-class survival. Aztec dancers still lead the annual *Dia de los Muertos*[5] procession through neighborhood streets, games of *futbol*[6] – not football – blare from radios and barroom televisions, and political debates take place on stoops and in back yards over glasses of homemade *horchata*[7]. How can this be?

Significant sectors of the Mission's residential population dispersed as displacement swept Mission residents further to the city's fringes and beyond (Beitel 2003; Olsen 2004; Solnit & Schwartzenberg 2000; Walker 2006). Even so, as this shift occurred, a coalition emerged between longtime residents, community organizers, and a few key planners who were interested in crafting a planning-community alliance that was not primarily focused on growth for the sake of growth. Planning for the future amid economic crisis was no small task, yet, like the dot-com boom itself, such activism was one of the dominant stories of the time (Chion 2013). This paper contends that the recent economic wave has not entirely bulldozed the qualities of the neighborhood largely because of the efforts of community planners, leaders, and residents who developed street-level planning expertise, fighting waves of evictions while drawing up their own vision for the neighborhood. Beyond these efforts, we recognize that the qualities of a neighborhood are produced at the convergence of multiple processes including the resilience of its social networks, the expansion of local businesses, the continuing in-migration of Latinos, the strength of cultural production, and the increasing economic value of entertainment. San Francisco's urban planners have been heavily involved in the Mission, and have viewed the neighborhood as central to a city planning process that looked at several adjacent neighborhoods on the eastern side of the city. The Mission, South of Market (SoMa), Showplace Square-Potrero Hill, the Central Waterfront, and Bayview-Hunter's Point neighborhoods occupy approximately one third of the city's land (see Map 1). Historically these "Eastern Neighborhoods" played a unique role in San Francisco as home to a mix of industry (production, distribution, and repair, as defined by city planners), artists' workshops, and affordable housing. They were also home-base for strong community support for working class and immigrant populations, although that position has always been politically contested; since the 1990s, development pressures have eroded this role.

We focus here on the Mission because it became a key political center for active community planning for the Eastern Neighborhoods as a whole. The Mission also carries a long history of community organizing, going back to the era of urban renewal. Local businesses, people, and community organizations in these neighborhoods responded to the urban effects of deindustrialization and government divestment, working to improve their communities through actions reducing crime and social tensions, strengthening businesses, and establishing cultural institutions and events (Castells 1985; Mirabal 2009).

In the 1990s changes in land-use policy supported live-work loft development, allowing an influx of high-end development that incentivized evictions, enabled by a developer-dominated city planning

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[5] *Dia de los Muertos*: November 1. The Mexican celebration of All Saints' Day; families celebrate the memories of loved ones who have died.
[6] *Futbol*: Soccer, rather than American football.
[7] *Horchata*: A sweet rice-based drink.

commission. The dislocation of blue-collar employers also became commonplace. Community organizations began to learn the language of formal urban planning, and to muscle into the City Hall process. Community leaders, working with city planners and politicians, created formal and informal community planning paradigms, forcing the shift away from developer-centered decision making. They were trying to save their community: a Latino working-class stronghold since the 1960s that had nurtured an ethnically diverse cultural and political fringe (Sandoval 2011; Solnit & Schwartzenberg 2000). In spite of the great economic shifts that could not be slowed in the years that followed – such that the Mission continued to gentrify even as the economy collapsed, as mentioned above – community intervention in the planning process was instrumental in preventing a wholesale transformation of the Mission.
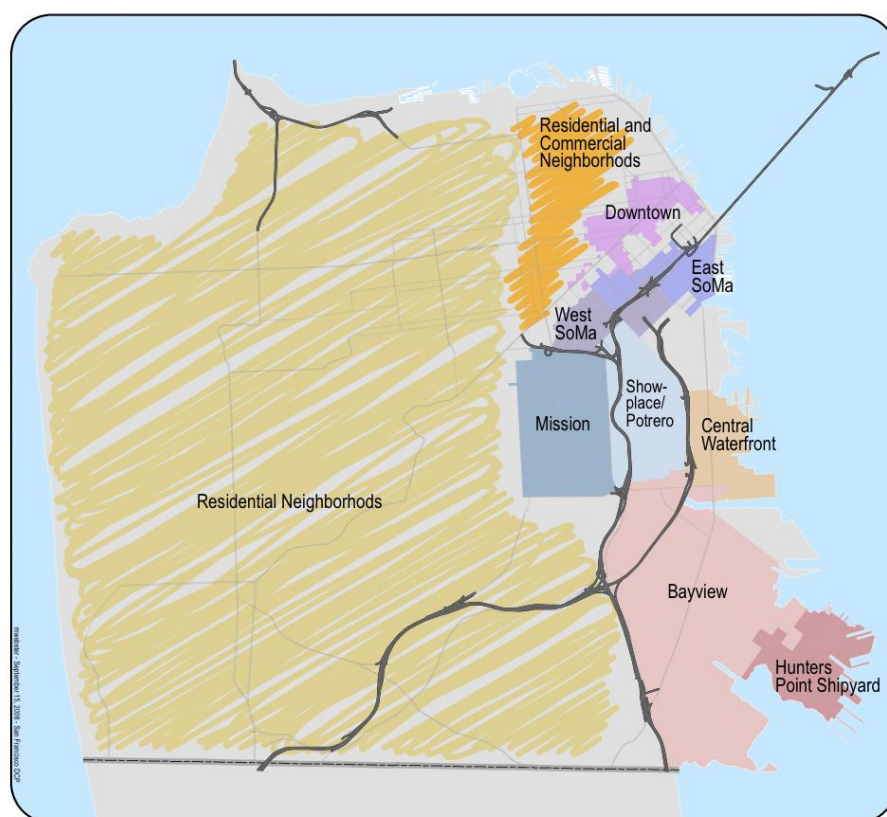
Map 1: San Francisco Neighborhoods: Downtown, Eastern Neighborhoods and other Residential Neighborhoods (source: San Francisco Planning Department)

At the *Just Metropolis* Conference held at the University of California, Berkeley in June 2010, planners and activists reunited to reflect on this time and take stock of more than a decade of organizing in the Eastern Neighborhoods. The objective was a public conversation that brought out some of the tensions and successes of the time, as part of a discussion about the possibilities for community-centered planning. Participants included community leader Ada Chan, who organized and convened multiple grassroots organizations against the abuses of local government decisions and regulations, and Oscar Grande, who worked with Latino families and youth and defended tenants against eviction. Chan and Grande were both leaders in MAC, the Mission Anti-

Displacement Coalition.[8] The city's onetime Chief Planner, Amit Ghosh, defended city policies and crafted zoning rules; he joined the panel as well. Finally, Planning Commissioner (and co-author of this article) Lisa Feldstein joined the panel to discuss her role in voting – often in the minority– on controversial land-use regulations and projects.

The panel also involved the two other authors of this article. Rachel Brahinsky, a former newspaper reporter on planning issues, moderated the panel, which had been convened by Miriam Chion, a lead city planner for San Francisco's Eastern Neighborhoods Community Planning process from 1998 to 2004. The three of us, Brahinsky, Chion, and Feldstein, subsequently moved towards academic positions; we write this piece as part of an effort to better integrate our intellectual work, professional practice, and everyday lives.

Our panelists were key actors, part of a larger system of forces that influenced who could remain in the city, make money, or raise a family. To an extent they shaped how – and by whom – the neighborhood culture would transform. In doing so, they negotiated with developers and with a political regime largely financed and inspired by development capital. This article collects some of the difficult dialogues that ensued amongst our panelists as they reflected upon the political dynamics that shaped the recent urban changes.

Before delving into these rich dialogues, we provide our approach to urban development as well as an overview of San Francisco's community, government and planning contexts. The purpose is to situate our analysis and help international readers make sense of the local city-planning context.

1-Approach to urban development

One common analytical framework through which to discuss the urban tensions we have witnessed in San Francisco has been *gentrification*, which we understand broadly as the replacement of low-income or working class businesses or residents – often disproportionately people of color – by wealthier ones. Gentrification conceptually helps explore the political, economic, and even physical violence, against low-income populations that are forced to relocate as their homes are reconfigured via market-economics or cultural turns (Beauregard 2006; Lees, Slater & Wyly, 2008; Redfern 2003; Slater 2009; Smith 1996; Smith 2002).

Often, however, conceptualizations of gentrification elide important dynamics on the ground. Romanticized images of underutilized land ripe for development, on the one hand, or of a working class caught in poverty cycles they cannot escape, on the other, do not do justice to complex urban dynamics that give rise to community organization (Goldsmith & Blakely 2010; Massey & Denton 1993; Wilson 1987). Positioning neighborhoods and residents of color as hapless victims of real estate investments ignores the vitality of the neighborhoods and obscures the role of the existing communities in both producing *urban vitality* and negotiating their development choices (Chion forthcoming). We are concerned with the complexities of these tensions and the power of the community to shape their development choices. Through our panelists' words, we thus explore community organization –counter movements to market forces – as an essential dimension of urban development.

We consider three perspectives that frame our inquiry into the urban development process of the Mission District. First, we acknowledge that neighborhoods are constantly changing: shops come and go, residents move – new artists, new demographies, and new institutions emerge (Lefebvre 1991). Structural forces of class struggle and capital flows play a foundational role in catalyzing this

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[8] Founded in 1999, the Mission Anti-displacement Coalition (MAC) comprised a group of community organizations and individuals who joined forces with the shared goal of stopping the displacement of working people from San Francisco (see http://missionantidisplacement.blogspot.com/).

change (Smith 1996). Yet our inquiry focuses on *how* they are changing, and particularly how community organizers and government actors negotiate these changes.

Second, we recognize the resilience of neighborhood vitality. Borrowing from the literature on social ecological systems, we take Nystrom and Folke's (2001) definition of spatial resilience as "the dynamic capacity to cope with disturbance and avoid thresholds at scales larger than individual ecosystems." This process acknowledges disturbance to existing conditions as well as the capacity to address change. We explore how, despite strong pressures to make room for upscale residents and businesses, community organizations and city-planning agencies supported the retention of existing urban qualities, the social and spatial resilience of places (Irazabal 2005).

Third, we focus on the cross-community dialogue as data to understand the complexity of power relations (Bell and Binnie 2004, Castells 1996; Massey 2005). We see this conversation about policies, rules, and decisions as a vehicle for understanding social tensions and the convergence of multiple activities shaping the qualities of the neighborhoods. We recognize the value of statements and expressions as essential knowledge in our understanding of urban change.

Using this framework, we focus on the intersections between community organizations and local government in their work to support the livelihoods of residents and businesses that have been constructing the Mission, and the Eastern Neighborhoods more broadly, for several decades. Our approach is not to "discover" the vitality or potential of these places. We want to understand how community organizations managed to shape and change neighborhoods in spite of, or in collaboration with, the other forces at work in urban transformation.

Community, Government and Planning in San Francisco

The concept of community is tricky, subject to appropriation and shifting claims. In this article we use community to signify several interlocking factors that defined the area of contestation. First, there is the geography within which the predominantly working-class Mission was, and continues to be, closely identified. The lived boundaries of the Mission are less sharp than those in our map (Map 1), but the neighborhood is - or was - visually cohesive and evokes a strong sense of place. Its working class history is inscribed in the mix of uses: brightly colored Victorian-style buildings of modest workers' apartment housing are walking distance to 19th Century warehouses, small-scale manufacturing companies, and *bodegas* that might extend credit until payday. The places that delineate this spatial community are the gathering points: plazas, schools, *bodegas*, churches. These places are intermingled with the new economic trends we mentioned earlier.

The community also refers to the residents, but here our thinking is more restrictive. As we define this community, its members are those directly engaged in the production of the neighborhood. We focus on those who were threatened with displacement: the loss of neighbors, the loss of home, the renting of the fabric of their lives. Working class, and with a large immigrant component, community members were bound by shared traditions and a hybrid of cultures. Several im/migration waves of Latino population shared political and economic challenges such as the Bracero program of the 1950s, or the military regime violence of the 1980s in places like Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Chile and Peru.

The community evolved over the years as a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural agglomeration. Local store owners, immigration lawyers, teachers, theater managers, or NGO directors; they were white, black and Asian, often replacing the largely Irish-immigrant mid-century population. Residents engaged in the production of the neighborhood and – themselves part of the working class – often had an appreciation for the importance of making it possible for working class populations and diverse cultures to remain in the city. In this context, our definition of community includes people at

risk of displacement, or concerned about those at risk; the community we study is linked by an understanding that the *vitality* of a city derives from cross-class and cross-cultural mixing and respect (Chion forthcoming).[9]

The engagement of this community in the government and formal planning process is central to our story. The US does not operate under a centralized or federal planning structure: city planning is a local function (Fulton 2005). A large city department overseen by an appointed commission of seven citizens manages San Francisco's planning efforts. This commission has appellate authority over small decisions, and is advisory to the city's legislative body, the Board of Supervisors, for larger efforts like the Eastern Neighborhoods (Charter of the City and County of San Francisco 1996). The mayor, whose official involvement is limited to selecting the department head and a majority of the commissioners, in practice can wield great political power over planning in San Francisco. This was especially so in the 1996-2004 period, during Willie Brown Jr.'s tenure as mayor, when many of the Eastern Neighborhoods' battles were fought (King 1996).

 The socio-economic composition of those who manage the city planning processes is in stark contrast to those in the Mission District whom they most directly impact. The Mission District, housing about eight percent of the city's approximately 800,000 residents, has a dominant Latino and working class composition with lower incomes, higher poverty rates, and less educational attainment than San Francisco at large.[10] The City's planning staff are highly formally educated, well compensated, and have historically reflected the profession's white-male majority.

2-Community Planning Dialogues

In the following excerpts from conversations with our panelists we tease out the political dynamics of the interactions between community organizations and government agencies in their efforts to work in and plan for the community, as well as the complexity of communication across the languages of formal planning and everyday life.[11]

Planning amid crisis

At the Just Metropolis Conference, our panel began with the challenge of planning for the future of communities when those places were already in turmoil, as was the case during peak moments of the dot-com boom. Panelists presented multiple ways to understand the crisis in a shifting terrain as people and capital flowed in at top speeds.

Our panelists unfolded the multiple dimensions of the broader urban crisis, beyond housing. To be clear, housing affordability presented enormous challenges: two-thirds of San Franciscans rent housing (US Census, 2000).In 2000 the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment was $2,750, while the median sales price for a home was $540,000. Sales and rental prices increased by more than 70 percent between 1997 and 2000 (San Francisco Planning Department, 2005). Rising property values increased speculation and displacement, exacerbating San Francisco's perpetual lack of sufficient

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[9] Our definition of community in this piece excludes developers and new professional residents who engaged in the neighborhood essentially as *consumers*. Others have written much about young urban professionals, envisioning the shabby-chic, bourgeois bohemians, and hipster interlopers as a sort of universal gentrifier (Florida 2002; Howell 2005). Still others have focused on the structural role of development capital in gentrification (Smith & Hackworth 2001). We acknowledge but do not re-tread this conceptual ground here.

[10] Compared with San Francisco at large, median Mission household income was less than 80 percent; poverty rates were more than 50 percent higher, and the share of residents with less than a high school education was 15 percent higher. This geography includes most of the following Census Tracts: 201, 202,207, 208, 209, 210, 177, 228, and 229 (U.S. Census 2000).

[11] Excerpts from the Just Metropolis Conference panel were supplemented with follow-up interviews.

affordable housing. Thus, for activists on the ground, the crisis in the lives of evictees felt perhaps the most intense.

Oscar Grande: "Planning in crisis. We do it every day. But crisis also brings an opportunity to reach across the aisle, and reach out to people that you don't necessarily see yourself working with, people who don't necessarily go to your church or to your schools. Because of the compactness of our community and the density of our community, [these alliances are] necessary in order to build a social movement that addresses some of the wrongs that this reckless development created."

Ada Chan: "I experienced crisis more on the cultural front. The neighborhood disappeared, but did anyone notice? Or were they just excited that the Slanted Door [restaurant] was there and that [former US] President [Clinton] came to eat there in the Mission? That's how I experienced it, in terms of who dominated the public space, who dominated the sidewalks."

Lisa Feldstein: "The reason I was appointed to the Planning Commission was actually a result of some of this crisis. The voters of San Francisco were concerned enough about the role of the mayor in directing development in the city that they actually changed the composition of the Planning Commission so the mayor did not have the level of control over it that he had previously. Now, the president of the Board of Supervisors also had the opportunity to put people on that commission, and that's how I ended up there. It was a political crisis. The problem was who actually controlled the city, and what kind of control those people had. For example planners installed interim controls that included certain requirements around housing affordability. But the city attorney told developers to ignore those requirements – even though they were law. You start to question who is in charge. If we're saying that the laws don't apply – do we have any laws?"

Amit Ghosh: "If you were wondering who Oscar [Grande] was referring to when he had to reach out across the divide and embrace – it was us. We have broken a lot of bread since, but it all started with a dance on the table. Oscar and others walked into the Planning Department and shook the rafters [as part of a direct-action political demonstration]. They marched and jumped up on the Zoning Administrator's desk!

"But from the perspective of professional planners, there was a huge opportunity in San Francisco. The market was hot. In San Francisco, there are more controls on the market than anywhere else, and yet the more controls there are, the more the market figures out ways to spin circles around the controls. [What we saw in the late '90s was developers] going for the lowest hanging fruit, which was the low-cost, unregulated industrial zones. We had the use of computers for the first time then – and very quickly we were able to go parcel by parcel to figure out exactly how the land was being used and what made sense to planners."

The contrasting and complementary perspectives of the panelists provide insights into their positionality vis-à-vis the Mission and planning processes. Grande takes crisis as an ongoing ontological condition for the working class, an unavoidable position within capitalism from which to find opportunities that will bring resources to the community. Chan and Feldstein focus on the force and abuse of power, from cultural, political and legal perspectives. From the streets to regulations, those domains were appropriated by a powerful class with resources. At the same time, that appropriation was recognized as unfair and challenged by the power of the community. Confronting these tensions, Ghosh is particularly concerned with the institutional tools and the dilemmas of a planning practice supported and trapped by technology and data.

Ghosh's comments reflect the challenges of city planners caught between serving at the pleasure of a strong mayor, dealing with the dominant technocratic approach of the planning field, and listening to the increasingly powerful voices of activists and residents. It was a heady time. The growing political power of developers engendered deep community anger, which led to a progressive-left takeover of the Board of Supervisors. This political sweep transformed the power dynamic that had enabled Mayor Brown's control over development decisions. Community concerns found an opening in the planning process through commissioners like Feldstein, appointed by the new Board.

Intersections of multiple voices

In this moment of political and economic crisis, the planning process was infused with a cacophony of voices from new residents and developers, workers and artists, community leaders and business leaders. The lived experience of crisis in everyday life shaped the planning process in ways that were

new and unexpected for planners and local decision-makers. This became particularly complicated as community organizers shifted their engagement from reactive anti-eviction demonstrations to proactive land-use workshops. This community engagement pushed the planning process outside its traditional technical and administrative domain.

Participation in planning had been, typically, directly linked to economic gains and losses for residents and property owners. Community leaders without economic sway had to force their way in to the public process in order to be heard. MAC started organizing its own community planning workshops as a preamble to the city-run workshops. Their grassroots networks and bilingual outreach to tenants brought members of the public to the workshops that the Planning Department staff had been unsuccessful in reaching.

Grande: "A lot of our community isn't going to the Planning Department, making additions to their [balconies], adding a second floor, or asking to add two feet to their basement. These folks don't own; we're renters, for the most part. So we'd never had the experience with the Planning Department, and much less planning, the planning process."

Chan: "Ultimately the people who come to the planning meetings are people who are there to make sure that their assets, their land investments, increase in value... Amit [Ghosh] did something interesting at one of the meetings... He asked: 'How many people here are in the real estate industry?' And every single person in that meeting was a developer, a land use lawyer, an architect, a student, future planner – and I think there were three of us, the three people of color in the audience, that had come from the Mission to sit there. It was so powerful to just show what were the interests at that table. ... So if I am a land use lawyer and I'm paid per hour I can show up to ten-year's-worth of meetings; endlessly I will bill [my clients]. But if you've got your kids and you're coming home from work, and you have to feed them, are you going to this meeting to talk about what happens at 333 Harrison St.? Or are you going to do homework with your kids after school? It's a different thing, you don't get a value, there's no asset accrued to you personally from that. Oh, but as land values go up your landlord is starting to get a little greedy because he's not realizing as much value out of his building. So I think those dynamics of how we as people who lead the community processes are important. How are we thinking about who's speaking and what their interests are? What do we believe the planning process is? And what is our public responsibility in the process?"

In the neighborhoods, residents watched as dotcom millionaires appropriated their communities. In the hearing rooms at City Hall, however, community members entered spaces and processes from which they had previously been absent; like the developers in their neighborhoods, they inserted themselves into public spaces with force. Some fundamental disparities emerged during these hearings. Consultants and lawyers were compensated hundreds of dollars an hour for their presence, as Chan mentioned, but when MAC provided a *tamale*[12] dinner for Mission residents who had come to testify, there were outraged accusations that the meal constituted political bribery. When the city's hearing room became too crowded, community members were relocated to an overflow room where they could watch the proceedings on a video monitor, yet the planning regulars were not displaced from the hearing room.

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[12] Tamale: Cornmeal dumplings stuffed with spiced meats, vegetables or cheese and steamed in cornhusks.

Figure 1: Residential Claims (Source: San Francisco Print Collective, reproduced with permission; www.sfprintcollective.com): During the first dot-com boom the Mission Anti-Displacement Coalition (MAC) illustrated its support visually through the community by encouraging residents to put signs like this in apartment windows. Produced by the San Francisco Print Collective, which created a set of freely accessible posters that commented in the rise of gentrification, the set of images here raised claims of ownership and permanence, in Spanish and English.

Revendications des résidents (source : San Francisco Print Collective, publié avec autorisation, www.sfprintcollective): Pendant le premier boum internet, la Mission Anti-Displacement Coalition (MAC) a lancé une campagne visuelle dans la communauté pour appuyer leurs revendications : les résidents étaient encouragés à afficher des posters comme celui-ci aux fenêtres de leur logement. Produite par le collectif San Francisco Print, cette série d'affiches, distribuées gratuitement, critiquaient l'accélération du processus de gentrification. Ici, le poster revendique, en espagnol et en anglais, le sentiment d'appropriation des habitants et de la permanence dans le quartier,

Community leaders' ability to understand multiple cultural and political contexts often contrasts with the narrow and technical space in which city planners operate. Rather than think about the everyday activities of residents – and the real obstacles to their participation – it is far easier for planners to focus on developing technical tools that can be applied consistently across multiple neighborhoods. Connecting these epistemologies is often a challenge. Most interesting was the recognition of different languages and spaces for communication that went beyond the simple translation of flyers placed within a particular radius of each project, which is the usual planners' tool for increasing outreach.

Grande: "What we found real quick is that, [for planners], there is a check list, and as long as you go through that check list and you send your outreach [notification] to people within a 300 foot radius of the development, and make sure you get the schools and churches, that's enough... But really it goes way beyond just translating a flyer. It's also demystifying [the planning process], it's also speaking in terms that resonate with the community, it's also learning the nuances of our communities, and that we can't rely on a check list that says we did this in an African American neighborhood, let's use the same check list for the Latino neighborhood – and here is the queer community, here's our check list, we're done! I did it! We said, 'Hey, why don't we do a *reverse translation*.' So we've had several planning meetings held in Spanish, translated to English – because I don't know if you know how it feels to sit with those headphones and kinda be in that corner, where they whisper, 'That's the Spanish table...' It doesn't feel good, you feel like cattle, you feel like people are looking at you.

People look at you and say 'Man this meeting is going slow, because we gotta translate.' It's that arrogance, and that entitlement, that a lot of folks going to these meetings bring. They're not about going to these meetings to build community; it's really about going to these meetings to see that their self-serving needs are met, because that's what they're used to. And those are the things that we have to struggle with and continue to struggle with, and that's what you all as planners or budding planners are gonna fight with once you get into the planning system."

Grande and others channeled the community's rage at its marginalization into a wave of protests that flipped the notion of community planning on its head. A case in point was the unexpected visit of community activists to the Planning Department with loud percussion instruments; they marched around planners' desks in the middle of the workday, unnerving many department staff members. They demanded an immediate commitment to fund the environmental review for the Eastern Neighborhood plans. Without the environmental review, MAC believed the plan would be dismantled and decisions would continue to be made autocratically. When there was no commitment to fund such review from the interim director (a mayoral appointee), the demonstrators refused to leave the building; ultimately police arrested 17 demonstrators (Hoge 2003). Of course, not all planners were panicked by the show of community force – some had to be restrained from joining the protest themselves.

Ultimately MAC accrued multiple gains, actually obtaining the funding requested to complete the environmental review for community plans. Community efforts embedded community engagement into the decision-making process. Organizers eventually guided formal city workshops and wedged their way into leadership positions in public hearings. The strategy, as Grande put it, was to "crack open" the decision making process.

Grande: "We said: let's figure out a strategy that's not behind some sort of closed door, where we're negotiating around some table. Let's bring the negotiations out into the neighborhood; let's bring it out into the *barrio*[13] so everybody can be part of the negotiation; so we can be in your face and tell you these are our demands, these are our problems and these are ways to fix them and these are the type of resources that we need from you as planners. We're not developers or architects, we're organizers. We organize the community, [but] we become planners really quick, we become 'hood planners, we become ghetto planners, *barrio* planners. I think for us it was like how to demystify the system. So it's figuring out real quick what's the information we need to really mobilize people, to really get people to these planning sessions, to really get these people to go to the Planning Department, and to charge in uninvited. Our tactics – some flopped, many of them worked. [We went] door-to-door, meeting people on the street, having *pachangas*[14] [where we would discuss planning technicalities]. There is nothing like a party, nothing like sharing a cup of *horchata* – and talking about planning issues."

Very few professional city planners would combine zoning discussions with a party atmosphere where participants sipped *horchata* and nibbled *tamales*, while their children played together nearby. But the infusion of community input into the planning process actually resulted in the creation of new kinds of cultural-political spaces.

City planning workshops in the Mission eventually would draw around 300 people to discuss zoning issues in dialogues that went well beyond traditional workshops. Community organizers trained city planners on language and communication. Not all planning staffers welcomed this; many refused to be instructed by people who were less formally educated than themselves. However, several were excited about the proposition and not only worked on a new layperson-friendly, and Mission-specific, language, but also took on the tasks of turning that language into official planning materials and practice, crafting announcements in accessible language, asking grocery stores and community centers to pass the word around, and helping to secure food, music, and childcare for events.

In pre-workshop sessions organizers emphasized core reasons for intervening at the early stage of development decisions – so MAC would not be consigned to merely reacting to eviction notices.

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[13] Barrio: Though the term simply means neighborhood, in the U.S. context barrio typically signifies an urban Latino neighborhood.
[14] Pachangas: Gatherings, parties.

Guatemalan marimbas and Pilipino bamboo dancers opened the workshops; local restaurants donated big pots of rice and beans or rice noodles. Planners and residents shared childcare duties.

Sustainability of Community Planning

Our panelists reflected on the challenge of dealing with different social realities, levels of power, and time frames in an open community planning process. Though he is aware of uneven power dynamics, as mentioned above, Ghosh believes community organizing does not necessarily achieve the optimum result for a city; he approaches planning as a neutral ground for balancing multiple interests and as a technical tool. By contrast, our other panelists approach planning as a tool for political decisions on the distribution of power and resources, and maintain that even the proposal of more equitable distribution would not exist without activism's pressure.

Chan: "During the boom, community issues would never have been considered [without pressure from community organizers]. Low-income people are not the 'highest and best use,' for planners. The sexiness of selling to a developer is always first... For me, we have real impacts every day in the lives of people. When you sit inside the planning office you work on a 20-30 year timeline, so the sense of urgency [is totally different]. For people on the street, when we saw that empty lot, we weren't thinking about it for 20 years from now, but for NOW."

Feldstein: "Power concedes nothing without struggle. In San Francisco there are a lot of examples of issues either being ignored until they were organized around, or of organizing being what tipped the balance. Some of those have had remarkably good outcomes. For example, PODER [People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights, Grande's organization] and other activist groups in the Mission were able to really change [the conversation] about land use. That was a huge victory. Even if people did not get exactly what they wanted, the conversation would not have gone in the direction it did if it weren't for that work. So I think that we talk about the developers and politicians having all of the control, but in fact it is organizing that defines how the conversations happen and what the issues are that are part of these conversations."

Feldstein and Chan highlighted the dimensions of time and power in community planning processes, as opposed to the neutral ground contended by Ghosh. We asked Grande about the long-term impact of planning activism; he noted that the goals of immediate impact and long-term sustainability were in tension with each other.

Grande: "[Even when we win,] the material changes aren't happening until well into the future. That has always been a challenge. It's hard to sustain people to fight for the long haul. Projects take a long time, [10 years or more to even begin in some cases. Since the dot-com crash,] MAC ceased to exist (in effect); the community is different, we've got all this new gentry in the Mission who don't care about racial justice; they want to have a good time. It's hard to mobilize our community now. There are a lot of other problems; the [down-turn in the] economy is huge, people are struggling. It is harder to organize under these conditions, especially on long-term urban planning issues. Where's the social justice piece in that, the racial equity in that? It's missing. How do we mobilize people to care? It's tough.

Before, we just wanted to be in the game. Now, our consciousness has matured. Now we're thinking deeply, not just about housing. Thinking about needs for undocumented people, for youth, etc – urban agriculture is a part of that– in our thinking about what kinds of spaces we want. We're more focused now on community control, issues of autonomy."

Chan, who moved on to work on planning questions in Oakland, just across the San Francisco Bay, insists that the Mission is in a better position, in terms of community involvement, than many other places – and that this is the accumulation of years of political organizing.

Chan: "The difference between the Mission and Oakland Chinatown is that Chinatown expected the Planning Department to facilitate the process for them. The Mission had a history of organizing. The Mission organizers worked outside planning to develop their own vision, not just for planning, not just to be used in the planning process, but for the community as a whole. Chinatown folks [sat through] a community workshop that did not provide translation [services]. The Mission would have never tolerated that; they would have shut down a workshop without translation."

Addressing Grande's role in shaping the community planning and development process in the Mission, Feldstein identified education as a tactic.

Feldstein: "Your strategy [in the Mission] was to educate people that the Planning Department was unable or unwilling to educate. It would never have occurred to them to enter [City Hall]. You brought them in there, and they told their stories

and they explained why this stuff mattered in a way that the [planning] commission would never have heard otherwise. You said these people matter, they live here, so they have to be part of this process. We learned from the community that you educated."

Today Grande at PODER and other community organizations continue this education process on social justice through workshops and lectures for city planners. However, Grande argues that much work remains to be done – both in consciousness and in process – to institutionalize changes in the community planning process.

Closing thoughts

   The dialogues we reviewed in this piece suggest two outcomes: changes in the planning process and changes in plans. Under the ongoing pressures of rising rents, community dynamics continued to shift as families moved out, businesses closed, and artists left their studios; thus the crisis continued. Yet the vitality of the community was not entirely erased. In our panelists' stories we find that the ongoing struggle to embed community needs into official planning plans and processes has not died, and may be entering a new stage.

Our panel's dialogue revealed how sophisticated community engagement transformed the planning process. MAC's engagement in the realm of technical planning opened this domain. We identify a transformation of the official planning dialogue, in which community engagement forced acknowledgement of affordable housing needs, cultural values, and neighborhood assets. While still a fragmented process, the technocratic and exclusive domain of planning was infused with social and spatial community insights that allow the recognition of neighborhood qualities beyond monetary land value. The community planning process merged *barrio* planners with municipal employees, and introduced planning commissioners to new processes of seeking spatial justice.

Plans and regulations were transformed to address community concerns that were essentially invisible to planners at the beginning of the process. With others, MAC collectively produced its own "People's Plan," which directly addressed community concerns and influenced the final adoption of the City official plan and regulations. Industrial zoning was partially retained, protecting a wide range of businesses that supported stable, local, blue-collar jobs. Live/work zoning that allowed a mass influx of luxury apartments under the aegis of art and work space was removed. A community benefits program was created as part of the development of high rise residential development in Rincon Hill. Height limits on Mission Street, the core neighborhood artery, were reduced to prevent a wholesale replacement of small stores by luxury condominiums and upscale stores.

These changes in plans and processes have also led to the development of new strategies. Signifying a "big little town," a strong community, or strong people, *Pueblote* is an emergent community strategy introduced by Grande's organization, PODER, in 2009. The term assembles *pueblo* (people) with *lote* (lot), to suggest a new type of community engagement. *Pueblote* is an organizing strategy with a clear, comprehensive development purpose: "(Re)Claiming Lots for the People to reclaim and repurpose city-owned lands in the inner-city, and advance PODER's vision of creating local solutions to the global climate crisis."[15] We distinguish *Pueblote* from Latino New Urbanism (Rojas, 1993, 2010), which seeks to incorporate culturally responsive Latino built forms into traditional planning processes, as well as from more traditional community planning models, which incorporate community input without attempting to shift the balance of power or economic rationales of planning (Loh, 2012). Instead, *Pueblote* reflects an attempt by community members to define their own development proposals – rather than waiting to react to developer-designed proposals that exclude community interests. Community leaders work strategically first to identify

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[15] https://ioby.org/project/pueblote-transforming-underutilized-public-lots-public-benefits

empty or underutilized urban lots and gather the community together to proactively suggest new uses. It became a concrete way to mobilize a stressed community in hard economic times, while fighting to insert community considerations into the everyday language and structure of city planning. This effort is built upon awareness of the importance of long-term institutional recognition of *community planning* – not just community *input* into city-led planning. Essentially, *Pueblote* utilizes community-scale planning knowledge forged through the struggles that our panelists described to knit together community spaces and the streets that they walk upon.

We end by returning to where we began, on a stroll through today's Mission. We close with an excerpt from a piece that Feldstein wrote about the memorial service for Eric Quezada, a central community leader in the events described in this article. It is through the stroll that we acknowledge the dynamic spatial qualities of the neighborhood. It is through the stroll that we see glimmers of hope for spatial justice in the convergence of multiple voices in the streets, one of the legacies of ongoing community organizing:

"Eric's memorial was also an homage to the use of urban space and the seamless multiculturalism that is San Francisco. The band leads us in a Second Line[16] down the wide sidewalks along Valencia Street... The street itself testifies to Eric's impact. We dance past used bookstores and trendy restaurants getting ready for evening service, past corner bodegas and stores selling expensive curios; tiny pocket parks and a shop which trades in pirate goods such as eye patches and peg legs. A DJ spinning records outside one business turns off his music as we pass; a group of musicians jamming on a corner join the brass band's song. People stop what they are doing to watch, some gawking, some looking satisfied, as though they expected a Second Line or some other equally unlikely spectacle – isn't that what the Mission is all about? ...The best urban spaces are almost infinitely adaptable. It is the route of a Second Line that seamlessly, naturally, encompasses the multitudinous cultural influences that make up San Francisco." (Feldstein 2011).

About the Authors

Rachel BRAHINSKY, Faculty Director, Graduate Program in Urban Affairs, University of San Francisco

Miriam CHION, Director of Planning and Research, Association of Bay Area Governments

Lisa M. FELDSTEIN, Adjunct Assistant Professor, San Francisco State University, Doctoral Candidate, UC Berkeley, Dept. Of City & Regional Planning

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[16] The "Second Line" is a tradition from the jazz culture of New Orleans. A "First Line" funereal parade of friends and family, celebrating the life of the deceased, wends its way to the gravesite for burial, led by a brass band. The "Second Line" comprised of brightly dressed dancers of all ages, follows behind. Contemporary iterations of the Second Line take place seasonally in New Orleans as a community-scale parade, without reference to particular funerals.

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