

Eastern Neighborhoods Community Health Impact Assessment (ENCHIA) Building a Vision for Healthy San Francisco Neighborhoods

A Project of the SF Department of Public Health

Community Council Members

American Lung Association
Asian Neighborhood Design
Center for Human Development
Charlie's Place
Citizen's Housing
GCA Strategies
Jardiniers / Nextcourse
Low Income Investment Fund
Mission Community Council
Mission Economic Development
Association
Mission SRO Collaborative
Neighborhood Parks Council
Okimoto-Saijo Architecture
Paul Terry & Associates
People Organizing to Demand
Environmental and Economic Rights
Potrero Boosters
People Organized to Win Employment
Rights
SEIU Local 790
SF Bike Coalition
SF Community Land Trust
SF Food Systems/Food Alliance
SOMA Family Resource Center
South of Market Community Action
Network
South of Market Employment Center
Tenants and Owners Development
Corporation
Transportation for a Livable City
Urban Habitat
Walk SF

Participating Government Agencies (non-voting)

SF Department of City Planning
SF Department of Parking and Traffic
SF Department of Public Health
SF Municipal Transportation Agency
SF Police Department
SF Recreation and Park Department
SF Redevelopment Agency
Board of Supervisors, Maxwell
Board of Supervisors, Ammiano
Board of Supervisors, Daly

Technical Advisors

Columbia University
Center for Collaborative Policy

Sponsor and Coordinator

Program on Health, Equity and
Sustainability, SF Department of
Public Health

January 10, 2006

Dear Board of Supervisors:

Please accept this comment letter from the ENCHIA Community Council in support of the proposed modifications to off-street parking controls in the C-3 district, including the elimination of minimum parking requirements, the establishment of a maximum structured parking cap of one parking space per two units, and the unbundling of the sale of parking and residential units. This letter represents the consensus position of members of the Community Council taken at our meeting of December 20, 2005. Participating government agencies are listed for identification purposes only.

By way of background, the Eastern Neighborhoods Community Health Impact Assessment (ENCHIA) is a multi-stakeholder and consensus-based process formed to analyze how development in the Mission, Potrero Hill/Showplace Square and SoMa neighborhoods affect attributes of social and physical environments that are most important to health. These attributes include adequate and affordable housing; convenient access to public transit; accessible parks and public spaces; infrastructure for pedestrians and bicyclists; safety and security; healthy economic opportunities; unpolluted air, soil, and water; and, cooperation, trust, and civic participation.

Coordinated by the San Francisco Department of Public Health, ENCHIA is a facilitated group process in which a Community Council comprehensively assesses the effects of development on these attributes and community health. Council members consist of business owners, community service and childcare providers, public health, homeless, environmental, housing, bicycle, pedestrian, transportation, and parks advocates. City agencies providing technical support include the Departments of City Planning, Parking and Traffic, Parks and Recreation, Public Health, Police, Redevelopment, and the Municipal Transportation Agency.

Since its inception in November 2003, the ENCHIA Community Council and SFDPH support staff have:

- 1) Developed an ENCHIA *Healthy City Vision*;
- 2) Developed community health objectives to reflect that vision;
- 3) Developed indicators to measure the those objectives and vision;
- 4) Generated and presented data on those objectives and indicators; and,
- 5) Identified policies and strategies to advance those objectives.

Currently the Council is in the process of prioritizing a set of policies to advance in the next year. We are also developing a set of tools by which to measure “Healthy Development.”

Strategies to reduce both parking supply and demand have frequently emerged in Council discussions as evidence-based approach to mitigate the negative health and environmental effects of traffic and congestion. Much research illustrates that automobile use has significant direct and indirect effects on morbidity and mortality. Motor vehicle emissions are the largest and fastest growing source of air pollution and greenhouse gases. Exposure to air pollution causes respiratory illness, cardiovascular disease and hospital admissions. Motor vehicles are also the most important source of environmental noise, which impacts sleep, work performance, and childhood brain development. Pedestrian injuries result from street designs that favor the movement of cars rather than people.

The majority of the ENCHIA Community Council believes that limiting parking supply is a good method to reducing automobile use. Traditionally, transportation planners have managed traffic and congestion by increasing roadway capacity. In developed urban areas however, land constraints and the need to allocate space to diverse modes of transport including bicycles, pedestrians, and public transit, make this approach untenable. Mechanisms such as bridge tolls, specialty bus lanes, high-occupancy vehicle lanes, vehicle quota systems, electronic road pricing, no entry zones, free rides on public transit, and parking fees, are all tools used to reduce the incentive of driving and control the flow of traffic.

A majority of the Council agrees that the proposal to revise off-street parking controls in the C-3 district is one that would support the Council’s goal of improving health through sustainable transportation systems.

We believe, however, that it is important to note minority Council positions within this endorsement letter. Some Council members and non-member stakeholders have expressed concerns that reducing residential parking downtown will reduce the overall market demand for housing and thus the availability of financing for housing. These stakeholders are concerned that equity investors are reluctant to invest in larger housing projects with less than 1 parking space per unit, given that there is no research indicating a market demand for housing without parking. If reducing structured parking does affect housing demand significantly, the environmental goals of infill development might be compromised.

There is also concern is that housing with non-independently accessible underground parking will be more expensive to build and lead to increased to homeowner’s dues or rental rates. Finally, there is concern that restrictions on structured parking will lead to competition for scarce downtown parking making the City less attractive to tourists and other visitors.

While we believe it is important to note these perspectives, a majority of Council members present at the December 20 meeting did support the proposed legislation. Below, we outline some of the key relationships between transportation systems and human health that convinced Council members and which support revising the City’s parking policy in C-3 neighborhoods.

Air and water quality

Nationally, the air quality impacts of automobiles cost the country 50-70 million days with restricted levels of activity, 20,000 to 46,000 cases of chronic respiratory illness, and 40,000 premature deaths. The close proximity of housing and roadways coupled with high traffic density exposes residents to environmental contaminants such as fine particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, and soot. Epidemiologic studies consistently find associations between proximity to roadways and respiratory disease symptoms and lung function measures.

The EPA estimates that vehicles in the U.S. emit approximately 3 billion pounds of cancer-causing substances such as benzene, formaldehyde, and arsenic. An impact on water quality is also apparent; runoff from roadways and parking lots, which include engine oil, antifreeze, and gasoline additives (such as MTBE), pollute both surface and ground water resources.

Noise

High levels of traffic also generate high levels of noise. Exposure to high levels of noise significantly affects sleep, school and work performance, temperament, hearing impairment, and high blood pressure. The combination of noise and poor housing is associated with higher stress and hormone levels in children. Improving residential construction, reducing automobile and truck traffic, or re-engineering traffic routes could mitigate noise levels in urban neighborhoods.

Pedestrian and motor vehicle injuries

Nationally, for people aged one to 40, traffic injuries are the single greatest cause of disability and death. Pedestrians account for 35% of all motor vehicle deaths in the largest cities. Children aged 5 to 9 years have the highest injury rate, and people older than 80 years have the highest fatality rate. Within urban areas, pedestrian collisions are more common in low income areas like SOMA and the Tenderloin, potentially reflecting a greater traffic volume combined with greater pedestrian activity. In 2002, San Francisco had over 5000 injuries involving vehicles. Reducing automobile traffic congestion by increasing the use of other forms of transportation may yield significant health benefits. For example, public transit riders experience .66 fatal accidents per billion vehicle miles, twenty times lower than the fatal accident rate for cars.

Based on research and evidence collected by the Community Council, we expect that reducing parking requirements in C-3 neighborhoods in San Francisco would result in: 1) reductions in vehicle trips, 2) reductions in vehicle volume, and 3) increases in public transit utilization. Such changes in transportation utilization patterns could result in the following direct health and environmental impacts:

- Improvements in air quality and related health outcomes (i.e. asthma)
- Reduction in traffic-related pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular accidents
- Reduction of traffic-related noise
- Improvements in physical activity
- Improvements in community cohesion and equity

We also believe that by unbundling the cost of housing production from parking works to make housing more affordable in San Francisco. Researchers suggest that on-site parking spaces account for more than 10% of housing sale price, and that many more San Franciscans could afford a home without on-site parking. For example, while the median home price in San Francisco is \$540,000, the City's median household income is only \$55,240. This requires a household to pay far more than one-third of annual income recommended by government agencies to rent or buy a home. This large disparity between cost and a family's ability to pay could be alleviated by reducing the cost of housing units.

Overall, a majority of members of the ENCHIA Community Council believe that this policy supports San Francisco's move to become a more livable and healthy city. Specific members in support of this policy include:

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Center for Human Development
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Low Income Investment Fund
Mission Community Council
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South of Market Employment Center
Transportation for a Livable City
Urban Habitat
Walk SF

For further information, please contact Lili Farhang at SFDPH at 415.252.3988.
Thank you very much for the opportunity to support this ordinance.