



Public Affairs Committee
March 11, 2025, 9:00 am – 10:30 am
Zoom OR 291 Geary Street, Suite 200
Minutes

In attendance: Stephen Brett, J. Timothy Falvey, Russell D. Keil, Jr., Donald Thomas, Wes Tyler, Spencer Sechler, Lauren Ellis, Pam Mendelsohn, Josh Callahan, Casey Neuberger, Brian Fenwick, Jessie Kozar, Tammy Brock, Santino DeRose, and Kat Daniel.

Staff: Marisa Rodriguez (CEO), Daniela Vasile (COO), Ken Rich (Director of Policy & Economic Development), Melanie Medina (Executive Assistant), and AnaKatrina Cortado (Intern).

1. Call to order and Introductions.

Marisa called the meeting to order at 9:06 am, and introductions were made.

2. Public Comment

Marisa called for public comment. Hearing none, she moved onto the next agenda item.

3. Announcements & Updates

- Union Square in Bloom 2025

Marisa announced the upcoming return of Union Square in Bloom and encouraged property owners and district stakeholders to participate by adorning their buildings with floral installations.

- Union Square Foundation Annual Luncheon – Friday, May

Marisa reminded the committee to save the date for the Annual Luncheon on May 2nd, which will focus on the theme of renewal. She encouraged attendance and invited members to bring their friends.

- CDA

Marisa informed the committee that the California Downtown Association Conference will take place in San Francisco starting March 12th. Additionally, she mentioned organizing a tour to San Quentin for a group of CBD/BID professionals to engage with incarcerated individuals about the factors driving retail crime.

- Powell Street Project Updates

Ken reported that the Powell Street project is progressing well. Marisa noted that it is unlikely the project will receive the full \$30M from the \$41M allocated for capital improvement projects through Prop B funding. Ken confirmed that, despite this, funding is available to proceed with the next phase, design development, which is expected to be completed by early fall. Tammy suggested that the first phase should also include completing the cement work, and discussion followed on the process required to accomplish this.



- SFPD Drone Usage

Marisa informed the committee that SFPD is using drones to reduce high-speed chases and improve response times. The Alliance is working with SFPD to station a drone in Union Square, which would reduce response time from 8 minutes to 2-3 minutes. Daniela shared that Captain Jonas, who oversees the Drone First Responder program, is involved in this effort. Marisa mentioned a visit to 291 Geary Street with Stephen Brett to assess drone placement.

- Shoe Palace Opening Event – Saturday, March 15th

Marisa announced that Shoe Palace will have its grand opening on March 15th and invited the committee to attend.

4. Action to approve the February 11, 2025, minutes.

Marisa directed the committee to review the February 11, 2025, meeting minutes.

Action: The committee unanimously approved the minutes from February 11, 2025, as motioned by Russell D. Keil, Jr. and seconded by Brian Fenwick.

5. State of Retail; Santino DeRose & Pam Mendelsohn, Maven Retail

Santino discussed retail activity this quarter, noting increased interest from out-of-town businesses and buyers. He highlighted that office market is strengthening, with low vacancy rates in core neighborhoods pushing businesses toward downtown. Pam added that she has received inquiries from international clients interested in Union Square, with positive feedback about its cleanliness and safety despite the negative press. However, Market Street remains a major concern, with over 40% vacancies and accessibility issues, particularly for hotels. Efforts are underway to address these challenges, including meetings with city partners like Supervisor Sauter, and a push to allow cars back on Market Street to improve accessibility for both locals and tourists. Russ added that the bike lanes on Market Street have reduced car accessibility, and despite the goal of increasing both bicycle ridership and public transportation usage, neither has grown as expected.

Santino also addressed challenges facing the food and beverage industry due to rising tariffs and the current political climate, which are impacting profit margins and may lead to a shift toward more casual or fast-food options. Pam mentioned growing demand for large retail spaces, particularly from entertainment tenants, but noted that finding suitable spaces in neighborhoods is becoming difficult, which may push these tenants downtown. The committee also discussed strategies to attract tenants to vacant spaces on Powell and Stockton streets and ways to revitalize large vacancies in Union Square to enhance retail and improve the area's appeal.

6. Economic Downtown Core Updates; Kat Daniel



Kat introduced herself, explaining her background with OEWD and current consulting role on a downtown recovery initiative with the Alliance and other stakeholders. She stressed the need for a long-term recovery strategy, as most current plans have been reactive. In collaboration with Ben Rosenfield, former city controller, Kat developed a model to integrate these plans and create a comprehensive approach for downtown's recovery. She highlighted the Downtown Economic Core Neighborhoods, including Union Square, as crucial to the city's economy.

Kat outlined a three-part solution: 1) Creating critical tools, such as dedicated entities and long-term resources, to support downtown recovery beyond the city's general fund, 2) Implementing transformative strategies to revitalize downtown, including office, retail, arts, culture, and residential spaces, and 3) Allocating a \$600 million bridge package over four years for capital improvements, safety, beautification, and business attraction, and arts and culture to restore market confidence and set the stage for long-term growth. She also discussed financing sources like the general fund, corporate campaigns, tax-based bonds, and existing project funds.

The committee discussed funding avenues for the downtown recovery plan. Josh suggested creating an "animated center" to attract people downtown, emphasizing the importance of understanding what motivates their visits. Marisa highlighted Macy's significance to the district and, with their potential departure, expressed hope that a local developer with a passion for San Francisco would repurpose the space into something beneficial. She proposed incorporating support for Macy's or the San Francisco Centre into the recovery plan. The committee also stressed the importance of focusing resources effectively to avoid spreading efforts too thin.

7. Adjourned: 10:33 p.m.

8. Upcoming Events

- Union Square Alliance Board Meeting – Thursday, March 27, 2025 – Location TBD
- Next Committee Meeting – Tuesday, April 8, 2025
- Union Square Foundation Annual Luncheon – Friday, May 2nd at the Westin St. Francis
- Mother's Day Fashion Show at USP – Sunday, May 11th