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Downtown SF Partnership shares action plan to a more walkable, active downtown

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San Francisco's downtown community benefit district shared half a dozen strategies this week to inspire a change of course for the city's slow and often moribund-feeling urban core, the results of a nine-month effort.

Downtown SF Partnership, the nonprofit representing 43 blocks across Financial District and Jackson Square, tapped design studio Sitelab to develop the "public realm action plan" in October with the intention of presenting it to San Francisco policymakers including Mayor London Breed.

The 143-page report — which can be found here — advocates for more greenery, more opportunities for kiosks and pop-ups and



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The "public realm action plan" from Downtown SF Partnership and Sitelab envisions greater activation with food and pop-ups for underutilized corners of downtown such as Belden Place, a long narrow alley in the Financial District.

more amenities for pedestrians to make downtown more walkable and vibrant.

"Downtown San Francisco finds itself at a pivotal moment," said Robbie Silver, executive director of Downtown SF Partnership who took over the new nonprofit one year ago. "We can embrace this opportunity to evolve our practices and places to better serve all who live, work, and play in San Francisco's urban and economic core."

The report recommended ways to "reclaim" curb space for pedestrians, emphasizing design changes and policies that draw people and bicyclists, "and not more cars" to downtown. The hope is that slight alterations — linking of several shared spaces here, a bike rack there — can make downtown seem more inviting as a place to sit and stay rather than pass through. It suggested specific "pilot" tweaks in places such as the Leidesdorff Alley where it hits Commercial Street or at the intersections of California and Drumm streets and Sansome and Sutter.

Other suggestions in the report included "creating a platform" for people to discover privately owned public spaces or events happening in public plazas. Another recommendation was activation for San Francisco's privately owned public spaces. As the report noted, 75% of these spaces have no visible signage and 79% offer no public restrooms.

Noticeably, the report did not dwell on the administrative hurdles that make even small adds like bike racks into potentially long, complex and costly affairs. In a city where new trash cans can take years and cost tens of thousands of dollars each a timely transformation of downtown feels far away.

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