



Downtown's recovery is The City's recovery

By Robbie Silver

Despite the difficult reality of shutting down The City, San Francisco's pragmatic approach to curbing the COVID-19 pandemic has paid off. The City has now reopened in alignment with state guidelines, at least 80% of its population has received the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, and we are close to reaching herd immunity. Still, the

ripple effects of the full shutdown and revolving door of reopening mandates has left our city with a long path ahead for recovery.

Downtown San Francisco faces a unique challenge toward recovery, especially as hybrid work models have become the new normal, leaving some offices of the largest tech companies empty or at limited capacity. To compound this, months of empty streets, closed storefronts and restaurants have intensified existing public safety concerns. These circumstances, coupled with a prevailing news cycle that drives the narrative of a depressed and desolate downtown, have not welcomed workers and visitors back as we hoped it would. While Shared Spaces, Great Plates and small business and nightlife relief programs have been instrumental in the survival of many businesses, additional programming and investments are required to continue this positive momentum.

Thankfully, downtown's struggle has not gone unnoticed by our city's political leadership. Mayor Breed, whose budget proposal includes a \$9M+ Downtown Recovery Plan, details a Downtown Community Ambassadors program to help foster a welcoming environment for those returning to work, residents and visitors. In addition, a series of events such as SF Wednesday's, will be held to engage those downtown and bring The City together. There is no shortage of efforts made to uplift the downtown core, such as promoting public spaces, installing art attractions, or ensuring clean streets and inviting gathering places.

The mayor's vision for this initiative is grounded in the fact that downtown is the

heartbeat of The City and without its recovery The City cannot return to its former vibrancy. Many businesses and organizations welcome these initiatives, which are aligned with the central purpose of the Downtown Community Benefit District's mission and vision for recovery—to support small businesses, revitalize our gathering places and ensure a safe downtown area that serves all.

As the newest and second largest community benefit district in The City, our parameters span 43 blocks of the Financial District and Jackson Square, and as its newest executive director, our organization couldn't be better positioned and equipped to lead in downtown's recovery. The Downtown CBD is working diligently on a series of initiatives, including the creation of a new public space across from Mechanics Plaza, creating an asphalt art mural on Battery Street, promoting Belden Place as a culinary destination, and investing in holiday projection lighting to bring downtown to life at night. In addition to these initiatives, the DCBD is focusing on increased public safety, and street cleaning services to ensure a safe and welcoming environment for all. We look forward to partnering with the mayor's office on her bold plan for recovery.

Now that the budget cycle is starting to wind down and plans are in place for our collective revitalization, there is one missing component: the willingness of people to come back downtown to work, shop, eat and participate in the initiatives set forth by the mayor and our organization. The success of these programs will be contingent on a broader commitment from San Franciscans, the regional workforce and visitors to make an active choice to participate in these exciting changes. In addition to coming back to work, it will be equally as important to be thoughtful about commuting, and to prioritize the use of our network of public transportation offerings such as Muni, BART and ferry services.

Through these efforts, downtown is poised to rise up from this devastating pandemic and ultimately transform back into a vibrant 24-hour downtown with bustling new businesses, safe nightlife, inclusive programming and welcoming storefronts. We can break the cycle of empty streets after 5 p.m. through the support of mixed use development projects where people live, work and play. Our collective commitment to downtown will breathe new life into the area and will set a solid foundation for a resilient citywide recovery. This is the time to be excited and committed to our city's future and all that it has to offer. It's up to us to create the downtown we envision. A downtown for all.

Robbie Silver is the Downtown Community Benefit District's new executive director. The Downtown CBD, the newest and second largest community benefit district in San Francisco, provides supplemental cleaning, safety and beautification services in the Financial District and Jackson Square.