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Downtown SF Partnership Teams Up with Gensler to Develop Design Plans for California's First Entertainment Zone

The community benefit district and design firm plan to implement new entertainment zone legislation introduced by Mayor Breed, by activating Front Street with streetscape improvements, signature events and live programming



San Francisco, CA (July 22, 2024) – The Downtown SF Partnership (DSFP), the urban place management organization dedicated to revitalizing and overseeing 43 blocks within San Francisco's Financial District and Jackson Square Historic District, today announced its partnership with Gensler, a global architecture, design, and planning firm, with the aim of developing design plans for the first Entertainment Zone in California on Front Street in downtown San Francisco.

The new Entertainment Zone was established in legislation proposed by San Francisco Mayor London Breed in May 2024 and approved by the Board of Supervisors in June. The legislation takes advantage of a new state law, SB 76 authored by Senator Scott Wiener, that was passed last year to enable the transformation of designated urban areas into vibrant Entertainment Zones. In these zones, visitors can enjoy alcoholic drinks to-go in outdoor common areas. Streets can be closed to vehicles and opened up to pedestrians, creating dynamic, walkable areas.

The legislation designated Front Street, between California and Sacramento Streets, as the first Entertainment Zone in California. To further enhance the downtown experience and build a more bustling streetscape, the zone will allow for three restaurants on Front Street – Schroeder's, Harrington's

Bar & Grill, and Royal Exchange – to sell open container alcoholic beverages during special events and other designated times.

In the coming months, the Downtown SF Partnership plans to unveil a new "nightlife renaissance" in the area to promote local businesses, generate economic activity and shift the paradigm of how downtown is used post-pandemic. Building off DSFP's signature, highly-successful activations like Let's Glow SF, Drag Me Downtown and Landing at Leidesdorff, the team aims to launch regular live entertainment and community programming on Front Street.

"There is a surge of excitement underway in San Francisco's Downtown, and we are thrilled to be the first City in California to take advantage of this new law that will create more economic opportunities for our businesses and bring joy to our residents, workers and visitors," said **Mayor London Breed.** "I want to thank Senator Wiener for bringing this to San Francisco and the Downtown Partnership who is a key partner committed to bettering our City."

"I continue to be impressed by the speed at which the Front Street Entertainment Zone is moving forward," said **Senator Scott Wiener (D-San Francisco).** "When I authored the law to allow San Francisco to create entertainment zones, I did so knowing that they would transform urban streets into outdoors spaces that can be enjoyed by residents and visitors. I am excited to see the collaboration between The Downtown SF Partnership and Gensler, and look forward to celebrating with the community when the project is complete."

"We are thrilled to partner with Gensler as this underscores our commitment to shaping a dynamic and inviting downtown that stimulates the economy, local engagement, and community building," said **Robbie Silver, President and CEO of the Downtown SF Partnership.** "An entertainment zone is more than just an opportunity for increased alcohol sales – rather it's a signal to how we, and other cities across the nation, think about and use our downtown spaces, opening up a realm of possibilities to new experiences that can draw people in. We look forward to implementing this work with the local business community, starting with the annual Oktoberfest Block Party this September."

"As a firm with its roots in San Francisco, we're deeply committed to helping lead the city's resurgence. As part of this effort, we're excited to partner with DSFP to envision California's first entertainment zone, which will activate our downtown with increased foot traffic and rotating cultural programming. Our shared vision for Front Street is one based in gathering, community, and connection – a vibrant destination for San Franciscans and visitors alike," said **Randy Howder, Gensler's Regional Managing Principal.**

"Downtown needs help. The formation of an entertainment district is a critical first step in bringing life back to San Francisco, but policy isn't enough," said **Andrew Chun, Schroeder's Managing Partner**. "The streets need to be transformed through both programming and design. We are really excited to have Gensler on board and DSFP leading the effort to reimagine how Front Street operates."

The strategy for Front Street is aimed at attracting businesses to occupy vacant properties and creating compelling destinations that draw visitors downtown. In July 2022, DSFP unveiled the award-winning Downtown SF Public Realm Action Plan (PRAP) (created in partnership with local design firm, SITELAB urban studio) which designated Front Street, along with the already activated Landing at Leidesdorff, a new downtown destination at the intersection of Leidesdorff and Commercial streets that was established in partnership with the City. The Front Street activation falls in line with the PRAP's "Convergence of High Impact Opportunity Zones" strategy. DSFP is actively fundraising to implement the second phase of projects outlined in the PRAP, including the establishment and activation of the Front Street Entertainment Zone and doubling down on supporting small businesses.

Following a series of stakeholder workshops, user interviews, and site research, Gensler will reimagine the street's visual identity, including eye-catching streetscape elements, vibrant public art installations, and lush greenery. The street's redesign will be enhanced and activated through dynamic programming, ranging from signature celebrations to recurring community gatherings.

The reimagining of Front Street is the latest local revitalization effort from Gensler. Signaled by the firm's recent move to the heart of the Financial District at 220 Montgomery Street, where the office's 300 in-office employees support the district's businesses, Gensler has since partnered with SPUR to explore policies for office-to-residential conversions, with the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce to design a sustainability incubator space, and with Dignity Moves to implement much-needed interim housing solutions.

The entertainment zone effort is one of many strategies to support arts, entertainment, and nightlife that is outlined in Mayor Breed's Roadmap to San Francisco's Future, a comprehensive plan to reinvigorate downtown and reaffirm San Francisco as a thriving global destination and the Bay Area's economic center.

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About The Downtown SF Partnership

The Downtown SF Partnership is a 501(C)3 non-profit organization driven by a mission to create a more vibrant, active downtown that directly supports San Francisco's economic development. The Downtown SF Partnership is a community benefit district leading a transformation in the Financial District and Jackson Square, working across the intersection of economic development and programming to revitalize 43-blocks in two of the oldest continuous business districts in San Francisco. These services include activating downtown's public spaces, promoting the district's identity and offering cleaning and safety services. For more information visit www.downtownsf.org. Follow The Downtown SF Partnership on Facebook (@sfdowntown), Instagram and Twitter (@sf_downtown) and LinkedIn (Downtown SF).

About Gensler

At Gensler, the value of our work stems from its positive impact on the human experience. We are a dynamic and collaborative design firm uniting creativity, research, and innovation to solve complex

problems for our clients. Our work challenges conventional ideas about architecture and the built environment. We aren't just designing buildings — we are reimagining cities and places that make a difference in people's lives. Founded in 1965, Gensler has built a team of 6,000 professionals who partner with clients in over 100 countries each year. Everything we do is guided by our mission: to create a better world through the power of design.