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Mayor Breed calls for 'entertainment zone' to rejuvenate downtown



New legislation piggybacking off of a state law could turn a section of San Francisco's Financial District into California's first 'entertainment zone,' relaxing stricter rules for bars' and restaurants' alcohol sales during street festivals — enhancing sales and a sip-and-stroll atmosphere.

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A liveliness downtown San Francisco has sorely lacked could be around the corner with a new city initiative for bars and restaurants allowing open-container alcohol at outdoor events.

San Francisco Mayor London Breed is proposing legislation to designate a corner of the Financial District as an "entertainment zone" with special privileges, piggybacking on a California law from state senator Scott Wiener (D-S.F.) approved last year which gives San Francisco permission to create these zones. The first such area in San Francisco includes three bars along Front St., but the goal is to pave the way for more parts of San Francisco – and cities around California – to enliven their downtowns.

"Downtown San Francisco needs a nightlife renaissance," said Robbie Silver, executive director of the Downtown SF Partnership, the community benefit district representing businesses in the Financial District and Jackson Square. "Opening streets for pedestrians is a proven economic strategy."

Breed plans to introduce a new ordinance on May 7 to establish the city's first such 'entertainment zone' along Front St. between California and Sacramento streets, chiefly benefiting three local bars – Schroeder's, Royal Exchange and the [recently reopened Harrington's Bar & Grill](#).

Silver's CBD and the Building Owners and Managers Association of San Francisco are in the process of setting up a new recurring event on the block with live entertainment and other activations to take advantage of the new permissions. The entertainment zone idea aligns with [the kind of fixes lobbied for by local nightlife veterans](#) like Harrington's operator and Tonic Nightlife Group owner Ben Bleiman where the focus is on making downtown fun again.

Breed's announcement follows her office's recent series of [city-organized concerts](#) that will take place across May, June and November around San Francisco as well as [other](#)

recent legislation to waive permit fees for block-party-style events and simplify the permitting requirements for vendors.

The press conference also arrives just after the previous night's "First Thursdays" event, which saw an estimated 10,000 people in attendance on a closed off section of Second St. between Market and Howard streets. It's the first of twelve monthly block parties called Downtown First Thursdays, modeled after Oakland's popular First Fridays.

If ultimately approved by the Board of Supervisors, San Francisco's entertainment zone designation would become the first anywhere in the state under Wiener's Senate Bill 76.

Prior to SB76, state law said that during events like street festivals and street closures, bars and restaurants could not sell into the event, as in, directly to people on the street. Only outside vendors had that permission – a state of affairs Wiener said at the press conference on Friday was "outrageous and makes no sense."

"It undermines the vibrancy of people going between inside and outside and everything being integrated," Wiener explained. "It's flipping the bird at our small businesses, who just have to watch as everyone else enjoys the benefits."

Wiener said he is in the process of authoring the next legislative step, Senate Bill 969, which would authorize cities in the rest of California to create their own entertainment zones.

"I saw a headline this morning about this being like Bourbon Street," Wiener said. "But there are a bunch of states like Michigan and Ohio have done to empower cities to have the most activated public spaces possible with people going out and enjoying themselves."

The city's Office of Economic and Workforce Development and non-profit San Francisco New Deal are also introducing a new business grant, called the Downtown Entertainment & Nightlife Revitalization Grant Program, in support of new activation events to draw people to the area. The ENRG grant program will offer up to \$50,000 to cover expenses such as permitting and planning, marketing, coordination, food and beverage, artist stipends, equipment and on-site staff.

While announced with the entertainment zone on Friday, the program grants are available for other outdoor events, live performance programming and even new proposed festivals. **Applications** will be accepted on a rolling basis, but priority will be given to those submitted before June 15 and uses that involve multiple existing businesses in the Mid-Market, Civic Center, Tenderloin, SoMa, FiDi, Union Square or Yerba Buena neighborhoods.

"This city has been notorious for saying no, you can't do things that bring excitement and fun and entertainment," Breed said. "We're changing everything to 'yes.'"