

San Francisco announces downtown revitalization strategic plan

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Danielle McLean
Senior Editor

Dive Brief:

- San Francisco released a new comprehensive plan aimed at reinvigorating the city's downtown and repositioning the city as the region's economic hub and a center for commerce, Mayor London Breed announced during her State of the City address Thursday.
- The city released a road map for its downtown that contains nearly 50 initiatives and nine strategies, such as making the neighborhood clean, safe and inviting; attracting new businesses in a range of sectors through tax relief and incentives, recovery assistance, and other methods; implementing the mayor's workforce housing strategy; making it an arts, culture, and nightlife destination; building new public transit connections; and launching a new marketing campaign.
- "While things have shifted profoundly during this pandemic, we also know that San Francisco's innovative and creative spirit remains as strong as ever," said Breed in a statement. "This Roadmap builds on our values and commits San Francisco to a clear economic vision to carry us forward."

Dive Insight:

San Francisco joins other cities throughout the U.S., including Denver, Boston and Minneapolis, that are working to revitalize their downtown neighborhoods due to a loss of foot traffic caused by businesses allowing employees to work remotely since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Like San Francisco, cities including Washington, D.C., and Pittsburgh are looking at strategies to facilitate conversions of downtown office space into new residential housing units.

Leaders in San Francisco have been working to find ways to revitalize the city's downtown for several years. The nonprofit Downtown Community Benefit District worked with an urban design firm to launch an initiative in 2021 to reimagine 43 blocks in two downtown neighborhoods. The group released its public realm action plan in July 2022.

By the end of 2022, San Francisco's office vacancy rate was 25%, according to the city. There are some signs of recovery, but downtown has still not recovered to pre-pandemic levels: Tourism surged in 2022 but is still down 18% compared with 2019, when a record high of 26.2 million people visited. Bay Area Rapid Transit ridership to downtown's four stations grew 85% from 2021 to 2022 but was still down 69% compared with 2019 figures, the city said.