

Friday, May 28, 2021

The Honorable Mayor London Breed
City Hall, Room 200
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102

Re: Permanent Closure of the 100 Block of Golden Gate Avenue

CC: Chief of Staff Sean Elsbernd, Policy Director Andres Power, Supervisor Matt Haney, SFMTA Director Jeffrey Tumlin, SFFD Chief Jeanine Nicholson.

Dear Mayor Breed,

We write to you as a coalition of nonprofit organizations, seeking support for our proposal to turn the temporary closure of the 100 Block of Golden Gate Avenue into a permanent closure – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We are a diverse coalition consisting of Mercy Housing, Larkin Street Youth Services, St. Boniface Church and Friary, St. Anthony Foundation, De Marillac Academy, Wu Yee Children’s Services, Lutheran Social Services, 826 Valencia, Livable City and Tenderloin Community Benefit District. This group includes *all of our neighbors on the block* in support of the permanent block closure.

But first, we would like to thank you for your leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. San Francisco County has led the nation in its response, with low cases and remarkably few deaths from the coronavirus, and we are grateful that our citizens were so willing to work together for public health. Second, we are immensely grateful to the city for accommodations that were made to protect the health of the people of the Tenderloin, especially for the temporary street closure on the 100 block of Golden Gate Avenue. At a time when social service organizations had to do everything either outdoors or online, having a space outside where residents of the Tenderloin (both housed and unhoused) could receive services in the fresh air, with space to practice social distancing, has been indispensable. We have been able to help people who we have never helped before – sometimes people experiencing homelessness are not comfortable seeking assistance indoors.

This street closure has also helped us to do some extraordinary things during an extraordinary year: things like COVID-19 pop-up testing; outdoor voter registration; distributing essential supplies like hand sanitizer and face coverings; drumming circles; a street mural; and hosting Play Streets events for children.

It also made clear something that we’ve long suspected: the people of the Tenderloin need more outdoor space. We know that the Tenderloin is one of the most dangerous neighborhoods for pedestrians (not long before the pandemic, one of the children attending school on our block was struck by a car on the corner of Golden Gate and Leavenworth).

We also know that it is one of the most park-poor neighborhoods in San Francisco. Like residents throughout the city, able-bodied Tenderloin residents are never more than a ten minute walk from a park. Unlike other neighborhoods, however, the parks are smaller and tend to be paved. With its denser population and large numbers of aging and disabled residents, the Tenderloin does not compare to other neighborhoods in access to green spaces.

If this block closure could become permanent, we would like to serve our community and help to address the disparity in green space by creating a green oasis in the heart of the Tenderloin that would benefit this community physically, mentally, and spiritually by:

- Providing a public green space that gives our community more room to engage in beneficial community activities, like ongoing Play Streets.
- Providing shade to mitigate the “urban heat island” phenomenon, which disproportionately affects young children, the elderly, people with certain pre-existing conditions such as diabetes or heart disease, and people who work and/or live outdoors.
- Creating a safe, traffic-free space for people to walk, sit, play, and move around.
- Improving mental health through plants and public art. Green space has been shown to have a positive impact on mental health. In the words of Oliver Sacks, “In 40 years of medical practice, I have found only two types of non-pharmaceutical ‘therapy’ to be vitally important for patients with chronic neurological diseases: music and gardens.”
- Creating a beautiful, safe gathering place for the Tenderloin community, as well as visitors to the neighborhood. A place that is safe for people to sit and rest, to talk, and be happy. A place where wonderful things can happen.

We believe in the power of community and human connection to make positive change. As a group, we are in agreement on how beneficial the block closure has been, and we have a shared vision for what it could be in the future. We are very encouraged by the broad support we have received from our community, and the active advocacy for our plan. One of our coalition members, St. Anthony Foundation, has long led the stewardship of this block and is happy to continue doing so in the future. St. Anthony’s Client Safety Services team will continue to maintain public peace through its trauma-informed de-escalation practices when necessary, and to continue its twice-daily sidewalk cleanings.

We look forward to partnering with the SFMTA, SFFD and other City Departments to ensure we can achieve our vision for a beautiful community space while also maintaining adequate access for all emergency vehicles as well as ample off-hours loading access and school drop-offs.

Yours in community,



Nils Behnke, CEO
St. Anthony Foundation



Simon Bertrang, ED
Tenderloin Community Benefit District



Casey Christian, Property Manager
Mercy Housing



Sherilyn Adams, ED
Larkin Street Youth Services



Theresa Flynn Houghton, President
De Marillac Academy



John Paul Soto, Deputy Director
Lutheran Social Services

Katy Birnbaum, Associate Director
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Br. Brian Trawick, Parish Manager
St. Boniface Catholic Church



Kameelah Davis, Program Director
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