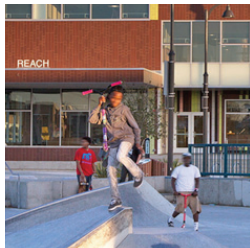
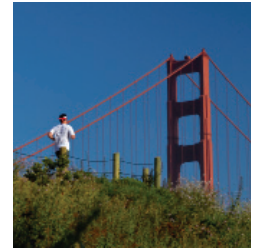
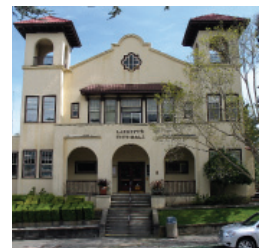




# Place



# Making



# In the Bay Area

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Parque Niños Unidos,  
San Francisco Mission District

# One: Place Matters

The spaces we encounter in our daily lives—the streets, buildings, parks and stores—influence our health, happiness and productivity. They make us feel welcome or unwelcome, energized or tired, protected from the elements or exposed to them. They help determine if we get enough exercise, eat fresh food, and participate in community life. How we design and use them helps determine how they affect us.

We are all involved in placemaking—the process of shaping these streets, buildings, and public spaces. It involves policymaking, planning, design, and development. It also involves everyone that lives and works in a place and finds creative ways to use a place for leisure, cultural expression and to meet basic needs. Once a place is built, it is continuously shaped by its users. A public space can be the field for pick-up sports games one day, the setting for a farmer’s market the next, and a music stage the next. Just as owners of industrial and commercial buildings respond to economic changes through retrofits to accommodate new industries, residents use streets and public spaces in a variety of ways to reflect cultural traditions. Tenants of commercial buildings change over time to reflect the tastes of a neighborhood’s population. Each person experiences the same place differently. In many cases this reflects our diverse tastes, incomes, cultures and physical abilities.

enhance air quality while cooling homes on hot days, and reducing energy bills. Walking along a street with long stretches of blank walls has been shown to bring people down; adding color, art and even a small amount of greenspace makes this walk much more enjoyable. Views of nature and opportunities for informal interactions with neighbors have been shown to improve mental health. Shorter blocks have been shown to increase walking, which reduces diabetes risk and improves cardiovascular health; when coupled with local parks and basic services, these positive impacts increase. Places such as restaurants, cafes, bars and clubs can provide important spaces to extend cultural traditions, cultivate a local cuisine, develop an arts and music scene, and generate new ideas, although they may be less universally welcoming.

Some elements of place are appealing across communities and have quantifiable benefits. Tree lined streets improve mood, reduce asthma risk, and



Downtown Petaluma: From vacant buildings to thriving center of community, guided by city council action to identify existing assets, catalyst projects and public places



### Why Discuss Placemaking Now?

Regional planning has traditionally focused primarily on two dimensions: the amount of job and housing growth in a community and the density and location of this growth. Placemaking addresses a third dimension—peoples’ experience of neighborhoods, main streets, and downtowns. This third dimension responds to a message articulated by Bay Area residents during past planning efforts: *how* our communities grow is just as important as *how much* they grow. Integrating placemaking into regional planning allows us to consider the short and long-term impact of our choices as policymakers and residents on the health and vitality of our communities. It also provides an opportunity to better understand the diverse perspectives that make up our region and imagine the possibilities of our shared spaces—in our neighborhoods, our cities, and our region.

### Placemaking Opportunities

Taking advantage of opportunities to create and sustain thriving places—whether they arise during day to day life or through major public investments—requires conscious action by community members,

elected officials, and staff. These opportunities range from street design standards and the use of public land to residents’ use of neighborhood streets and participation in planning processes.

### Streets, Parks, Plazas, and Public Lands

Public streets, parks and plazas are ripe for placemaking. The public right of way between private property lines typically makes up a quarter of a city’s land and is controlled primarily by local jurisdictions. The right of way can be a beautiful, welcoming environment for all forms of travel. It can provide places to continue cultural traditions, safe routes for children to reach schools, and comfortable settings for elders to walk. It can offer small pocket parks and plazas that serve as neighborhood gathering places while catching stormwater and recharging aquifers. The right of way can also be an unattractive, unwelcoming place that puts elderly and disabled pedestrians at risk, detracts from private investment and contributes to poor air quality and urban heat islands.



Doyle Hollis Park, Emeryville: Making the most of a public investment: gathering space, active transportation, and stormwater treatment

Publicly owned land beyond the right of way also presents a major placemaking opportunity. In a region with little available land, this is an especially valuable resource that can be used to meet community needs for open space, affordable housing, community centers, performance spaces, clinics and other services. Public land can also be used for private or public-private development projects intended to attract additional investment and provide a revenue source. Both public and private redevelopment projects can be designed in a way that responds to the unique needs of a community and creates collective ownership through meaningful participation.

### Buildings

Most people spend the majority of our time inside buildings; the design and upkeep of public and private buildings alike is critical to a community's quality of life. The vitality and safety of main streets is influenced by the buildings along its edge. Entrances and windows bring life and activity to the street while

long buildings with blank walls typically make an area less attractive to visitors and businesses. The kinds of activities inside buildings help determine if a neighborhood feels welcoming to the entire community and meets its unique needs; in a neighborhood with a high senior population, clinics and pharmacies within walking distance of homes help create a complete community. The height and style of buildings can respond to the historic identity of the area or respond to the aspirations of the community for its future, while also providing shade on hot days and a sense of comfortable enclosure.

### Infrastructure

Placemaking can also be integrated into infrastructure investments and improvements. Design standards for stormwater and other basic utilities can integrate trees and public spaces. Street lights and trash bins can be decorated with features highlighting a community's history and culture, and can make streets more welcoming in the evening. Taking a



Lincoln Park, Oakland: A place that meets a dense community's needs -providing children's play areas, sport courts, a cultural and senior center, and outdoor seating

holistic approach to local Capital Improvement Plans can ensure that placemaking is enhanced through infrastructure investments.

### Arts and Cultural Programming

Shared spaces such as parks, streets, and centrally located public buildings can provide exciting, low-cost stages for cultural events and open air galleries for public art. Arts and culture add life to public spaces and provide opportunities for community members to share and better understand each other's perspectives. Free performance and display space is critical to nurturing local talent, and weekend and evening events can increase foot traffic in downtowns and business districts. Over the long-term, the continuing presence of art and culture adds meaning to the physical forms of places and engages more visitors who experience the place in new ways.

Communities can capitalize on the placemaking opportunities discussed above by carefully considering the full range of potential benefits of each public investment, shared space and planning process. In the Bay Area, the most successful approaches to achieving this goal bring together a variety of voices and allow shared spaces to serve a variety of social, economic, and environmental functions. The next section presents examples from across the region of vibrant shared spaces that support health, culture, and economic development.



Top: Public Art, Oakland  
Bottom: City Hall, Larkspur

## Two: Place Stories

Each street, park, downtown, and neighborhood has a story that can be told from multiple perspectives. It has a history, a present day, and a future. With the rapid change taking place in many parts of our region, beginning to share these stories provides an opportunity to learn from each other and imagine the possibilities of the common spaces in our neighborhoods, our city, and our region.

This section tells the stories of five places reflective of our region's diversity. Each involves a different level of investment and change, ranging from transformation of a parcel in San Francisco's Mission District into a much needed neighborhood park to the regional vision for a 500 mile Bay Trail. The stories are unique, but illustrate themes relevant to a variety of places in the Bay Area.



## Fremont Street Eats

Fremont, the fourth largest city in the Bay Area, lacks a central downtown. Over the past decade, the city worked with residents and the business community to create a vision for a downtown around the Fremont BART station. The area is occupied by parking lots, government buildings, and low-density retail buildings. Realizing the community's vision—to create a place where people connect, communicate, and celebrate—will take time. In 2012, the city and chamber of commerce started an experiment: every Friday of Spring, Summer, and Fall, it transformed several blocks near the Fremont BART station from a wide stretch of asphalt into a place where residents can experience firsthand the vibrancy of a new downtown. Partnering with the chamber of commerce and local businesses, they created Fremont Street Eats, which brings together music, fresh produce, and a variety of gourmet food reflecting the city's diversity with trucks serving everything from French fast food to Indian Nachos and traditional Tacos.

The experiment has exceeded expectations, drawing hundreds of visitors and helping local food startups build the customer base needed to create a permanent business that can eventually fill retail space in a future downtown. The impact of Street Eats goes well beyond a traditional Farmers' Market; it has provided a temporary stage for community members to act out a more permanent future in which Fremont has the downtown it has always lacked. Everyone is welcome in this shared place and a broad cross-section of the community returns every week.

Combined with a stronger economy, Street Eats has helped attract the private investment necessary to realize the community's vision for Downtown—including a full-service grocery store, nearly 500 homes, and new workplaces. It the kind of inexpensive action a community can take to create excitement in advance of more extensive public and private investment.



## Parque Niños Unidos

The Mission District has been San Francisco's largest, most resilient Latino community for decades. The Mission survived years of disinvestment, urban renewal, and limited access to opportunity. Adding to these challenges, the neighborhood lacked places to play, learn, and experience nature.

In the early 1990s, the community began a 10 year process to create Parque Niños Unidos (Park of Children Together). Led by the community-based organization PODER (People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights), the neighborhood identified a vacant parcel of environmentally contaminated land and successfully advocated for the City of San Francisco to acquire ownership and build a children's park. Community members shaped the design of the park to reflect the neighborhood's culture and meet its needs. In addition to a playground, it includes a mural wall for the neighborhood, community garden, and club house with tailored educational programming.

Today, the park serves both the Latino community and more recent residents from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds. In a rapidly changing neighborhood where semi-private spaces such as stores, restaurants and clubs increasingly cater to either new or long-term residents, the park is a common space for everyone—where parents can meet and children of different backgrounds can play together and experience green space. Because they are able to come together, people are making their own stories —illustrating the importance of places able to evolve over time.

The story of Parque Niños Unidos is not over. Rapidly escalating housing costs and evictions is displacing longtime Latino residents that have defined the spaces throughout the neighborhood and created a collective set of community memories. This illustrates the impact on place of broad policy issues such as low-income housing preservation and production.



## Downtown Redwood City

Until recently, Downtown Redwood City was known pejoratively to some Peninsula residents as “Deadwood City”—a place with very little activity on the streets, struggling businesses, surface parking lots, and underutilized historic buildings. It lacked a “there” and the city lacked a common place for people to feel a sense of civic belonging.

The city’s transformation of Downtown involved imagining what might be possible using historic assets, and what might be possible through additional public and private investment. It identified potential catalysts for attracting people downtown and spurring investment—a historic courthouse, theatre district, and fine grained street network linking the downtown to a Caltrain station one half hour from Downtown San Francisco and Silicon Valley’s job centers. The most unconventional and transformative step was the demolition of a surplus county building to create space for a plaza and open up the historic courthouse building behind it to the street. The courthouse was refurbished as a county history museum that frames a busy square. The city’s Redevelopment Agency (now defunct) refurbished many of the Downtown’s historic theatres—which are now used for lectures, plays and musical performances—and added a new movie theatre to create a successful entertainment district. It also invested in sidewalks, street trees, and other amenities to invite daytime office workers and evening visitors to stroll.

The city’s public investments did not immediately spur private investment, but provided the community with a common space. People of diverse backgrounds have embraced the square as a shared resource: a place to relax, meet new people, experience art and culture, and celebrate old traditions and create new ones. The square hosts a farmers’ market, and food and music festivals.



During the recession, community members set the stage for future investment by adopting a Precise Plan for further transforming the Downtown. With the economic recovery, the plan has unleashed private investment from developers seeking a genuine “place” for tech businesses and their employees to live and to cultivate innovative ideas in coffee houses, bars and restaurants. Already, more than 1,200 homes and a half million square feet of commercial space are completed or under construction. Following the Precise Plan, each private development builds out part of the adopted pedestrian network and adds green space.

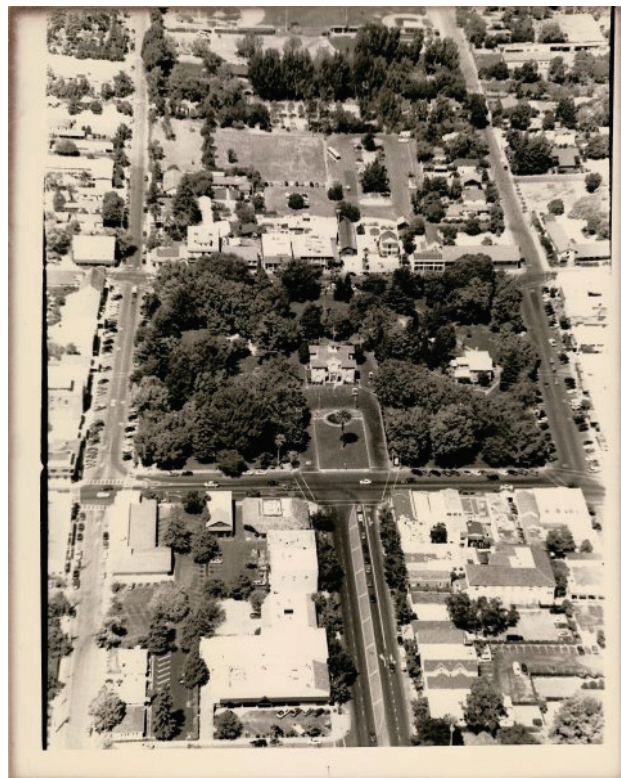
## Sonoma Plaza

Downtown Sonoma is designed in the style of a Mexican Pueblo by Captain Salvador Vallejo, who in the 19th century was assigned the Mexican Government to establish a mission and garrison. At the center of the pueblo stood what is now known as Sonoma Plaza. Initially used as a military marching ground and later as the site of the Bear Flag revolt, the plaza is now a communal green space used by Sonoma residents for relaxation and gathering.

The plaza's current appearance is the fruit of the Sonoma Valley Women's Club—which in the early 20th century led a successful campaign to add trees to the plaza, providing a sanctuary to the community in what was then a frontier town with dirt roads. The center then became the place to hold community events, conduct civic businesses, bring children to play, and take time for reflection.

The plaza is truly public and has adapted over time to the identity of Sonoma and the needs of its residents and businesses. Today it is the anchor of a thriving downtown business district that draws tourists from throughout the Bay Area and world. Residents continue to use the Plaza as the primary civic and community space in the city. Visitors can enjoy an open bottle of wine from one of the world famous wineries with tasting rooms around the plaza. Ample seating is provided for visitors to the Garrison and Mission historic park and shoppers at its artisanal craft stores. And the city has recently adding bicycle parking to accommodate the community's growing use of alternative transportation.

To Sonoma residents, the plaza is a constant that persists through new development, business cycles, city governments, and world events. It is a shared memory successfully preserved and enhanced by community leadership.



## San Francisco Bay Trail

Between the Gold Rush and the mid-20th century, one-third of the San Francisco Bay was filled, destroying 90 percent of the tidal marsh critical to our region's biodiversity, contaminating the Bay with industrial waste, and cutting off all but five miles of shoreline to public access. In 1989, plans were released to fill 60 percent of the remaining Bay, leaving only a narrow channel for navigation and sparking a wave of environmental activism that has helped preserve the Bay Area's landscape and spread an ethic of conservation.



In 2015, filling the Bay is tightly regulated, tidal marshes are being restored, and the Bay Trail runs 350 miles around the edge of the Bay. Building upon decades of grassroots efforts to halt filling of the Bay and create the Bay Conservation and Development Commission, the San Francisco Bay Trail is a catalyst in continued preservation of the Bay—allowing all of our diverse communities to experience the region's natural wealth and create shared ownership.

The Bay Trail is a long-term collaboration among many levels of government, community based organizations and homeowner associations initiated by a 1967 senate bill establishing a vision to create a 500 mile loop around the San Francisco Bay. Each segment of the trail is unique, yet connects with others as one place shared by everyone. It invites people from all backgrounds to enjoy their surroundings—providing an amenity for runners and local residents who enjoy the trail with their families, for office workers on lunch breaks, and tourists looking to explore the region's natural environment and communities. The Trail is also beginning to incorporate public art into the public spaces it connects; providing artists an opportunity to express their reflections on the Bay's natural environment and the culture of the history and culture of the surrounding communities.

The Bay Trail is increasingly integrated into the daily life of the region as it attracts people to the parks and communities that it traverses and creates a unique amenity that celebrates our natural wealth and connection with each other. It embodies the region's commitment to ecological preservation, healthy living, and diversity. It allows us to cross community and city boundaries that we might otherwise not cross. And it provides an example of the power of working together across jurisdiction boundaries to achieve a vision that none of us can realize alone.

## Key Findings

These five places have touched people's lives in different ways, but share some common features with other neighborhoods, main streets and downtowns in the region, providing insights to inform future planning and community participation. These places present three recurring themes that can be considered in our placemaking efforts across the region:

**Inclusive, Shared Spaces.** Shared spaces that improve a community's quality of life are inclusive and create a sense of belonging for people of diverse backgrounds, ages and physical abilities. Integrating a wide range of voices into the planning and design process leads to spaces that reflect the culture, creativity, and unique needs of a community and that people from all walks of life can experience on equal footing.

**Creativity and Catalysts.** Creative uses of public space—transforming a vacant lot into a community park, a block into a temporary downtown, a parcel with an outdated public building into a central square—can create a shared space for a neighborhood or entire city and be a catalyst for private investment.

**Vision and Coordination.** It can take decades to build a trail around the Bay or to enliven a derelict downtown, but a shared vision and a commitment to ongoing coordination can make these things possible.

**Connection to Policy.** The long-term vitality of shared spaces is closely related to policy issues such as housing affordability and funding for parks and community facilities. For example, addressing escalating housing costs and evictions is critical to ensuring that longtime residents that form a community's fabric and shape its public spaces are able to remain in place and sustain its unique identity.

## San Francisco Trolley Dancers

San Francisco's Muni Metro light rail system weaves through the city's neighborhoods and public spaces. Every year, the San Francisco Trolley Dancers transform a selection of places around the Muni Metro stops into performance spaces. Using a wide range of dance styles, the troupe has performed on the side of a wall, in a swimming pool, a park, and a basketball court. According to Director Kim Epifano, the performances give public spaces a new life and history, the essence of which lingers and resonates in the dancers' minds and in the audience's minds.



## Three: Place Actions

The update to Plan Bay Area—the region’s blueprint for sustainable development—provides an opportunity to open a regional discussion about the most effective approaches to shaping *how* our diverse communities grow. This will complement focused discussion about the preferred growth and transportation investment strategies, which address how much our communities grow and how to coordinate this growth with sustainable transportation infrastructure.

## Regional Actions to Support Local Placemaking

Regional actions to support placemaking can advance this discussion through forums, knowledge exchange, place stories, and support for community-based design efforts to implement plans for Priority Development Areas (PDAs)—places identified by Bay Area cities for future housing and job growth.

### Forums and Community Events

Forums across the region for elected officials, developers, planners and designers, and the general public focusing on the key placemaking themes identified in section 2 and previous regional discussions:

- Evening events featuring speakers, food and discussion
- Debates focusing on topics such as use of public land, inclusion, and the arts in public space
- Interactive “build your community events” for all ages with legos or other objects focused on an area expected for growth or going through a planning process
- “Walk audits” of neighborhoods and commercial districts to identify opportunities to improve the experience of pedestrians from all walks of life.

### Knowledge Exchange

Building upon the existing PDA Forums, opportunities to share best practices and identify common challenges and opportunities related to placemaking:

- Place stories website offering opportunities for jurisdictions and residents to add reflections and aspirations for their communities to a regional map; posts can also include art, music, and recordings of community events.

- Tours for elected officials, city staff and community organizations of successful PDAs and catalyst public spaces and development projects
- Annual best practices report sharing community-led placemaking efforts throughout the region

### Local Placemaking Support

Support local planners and community groups to identify and implement priorities for shaping shared spaces in Priority Development Areas, recognizing the important planning work already completed in many jurisdictions:

- Address current funding and time constraints by providing local staff with support for the design and placemaking process
- Continue to support placemaking through the PDA Technical Assistance Program
- Seek funding for pilot projects to integrate arts and culture into placemaking efforts
- University of California design studios involving graduate, undergraduate and high school students focused on specific PDAs .

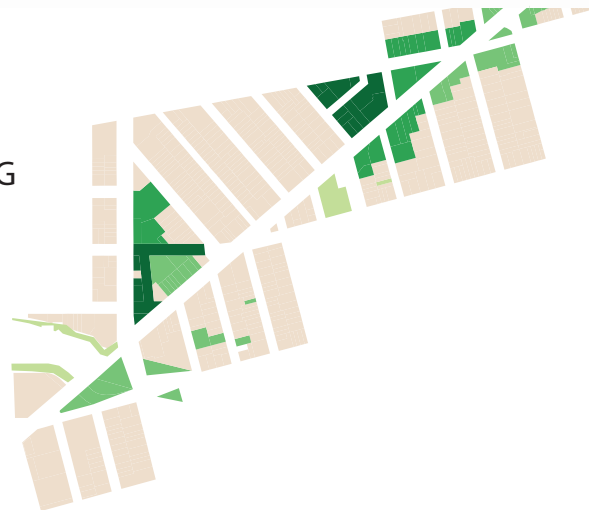


A **Spring 2015 UC-Davis Urban Design Studio** focused on the San Pablo Avenue Corridor. Professionals and students provided design concepts to the cities of San Pablo, El Cerrito and Oakland based upon community research.



	COMMUNITY	FOOD	CULTURE AND ARTS	GATEWAYS
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Renovate St. Andrew's Plaza</li> <li>Begin construction of job center</li> <li>Expand St. Mary's Center and reclaim portions of Brockhurst St.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construct building for People's Community Market</li> <li>Implement Healthy Soil Program, Green Cart Initiative and Easy Eats partnership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Renovate abandoned buildings for cultural and community groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement Funds from Freight policy</li> <li>Build noise barriers and vegetative buffers around West Oakland highways</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin construction of mixed use 207 unit low-income, mixed-use housing</li> <li>Expand People's Community Grocery garden</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin development of Food Center</li> <li>Develop urban agriculture areas around food node</li> <li>Begin development of three 83 unit mixed use buildings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construct four mixed-use buildings with 180 units each</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construct multi-use plazas underneath North and South freeways</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Renovate warehouse for expansion of St. Vincent de Paul's services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin development of five 138 unit mixed-use buildings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish civic plaza as open space framed by mixed-use buildings</li> </ul>	
4		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create main commercial node with reclaimed streets and four mixed-use buildings with 110 units each</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connect culturally significant buildings with outside spaces</li> <li>Create a shared street along West Ave.</li> <li>Reclaim 23rd St for pedestrian use.</li> </ul>	

### DESIGN PHASING



# Acknowledgments

## Working Group

John Beutler, Senior Urban Designer, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP (SOM)  
Steve Dostart, President and Founder, Dostart Development Company LLC  
Gil Kelley, Director of Citywide Planning, City and County of San Francisco  
Elizabeth MacDonald, Associate Professor, University of California at Berkeley  
Fernando Martí, Co-Director, Council of Community Housing Organizations  
Anu Natarajan, Director of Planning and Policy, MidPen Housing Corporation  
David Rabbitt, Supervisor, Sonoma County Second District  
Michael Rios, Professor, University of California at Davis  
Gregory Tung, Principal, Freedman Tung + Sasaki Urban Design

## Place Story Contributors

Mark Caberto, San Francisco State University  
George Herrera, San Francisco State University  
Estefaniee Sandoval, San Francisco State University  
Deodor Tronco, San Francisco State University  
Antonio Diaz, Organizational Director, People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights, PODER  
Bill Eckern, Director, Community Development Department, City of Redwood City  
Kim Epifano, Artistic Director, Epiphany Productions  
Gilbert Gong, Director, Lincoln Square Recreation Center  
George Mc Kale, City Historian, City of Sonoma  
Kurt Shwabe, Director of Marketing and Communications, Brighterion  
Dan Zack, Downtown Development Coordinator, City of Redwood City (Former)

## ABAG Staff

Duane Bay, Deputy Planning Director  
Miriam Chion, Planning and Research Director  
Vinita Goyal, Regional Planner  
Johnny Jaramillo, Senior Regional Planner  
Mark Shorett, Senior Regional Planner

## ABAG Executive Leadership

Julie Pierce, President, Councilmember, City of Clayton  
David Rabbitt, Vice President, Supervisor, County of Sonoma  
Ezra Rapport, Executive Director  
Brad Paul, Deputy Executive Director  
Kenneth Moy, Legal Counsel

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Steve Bowles, Steve Rhodes, thekermanns  
Kurt Shwabe  
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P.O. Box 2050  
Oakland, CA 94604-2050

510.464.7900 PHONE  
510.464.7970 FAX  
info@abag.ca.gov E-MAIL  
www.abag.ca.gov WEB