

January 19, 2024

Rich Hillis, Director of Planning
San Francisco Planning Department
49 South Van Ness Ave., Suite 1400
San Francisco, CA 94103
rich.hillis@sfgov.org

Subject: **Analysis of Planning Department's Housing Survey**

Dear Director Hillis:

Thank you for scheduling a meeting with us for later this month to discuss the purpose and specific plans for upzoning. Additionally, we'd like to share our insights into the [recent survey](#) conducted by the Planning Department and get your response.

Our team, including seasoned experts in communications and market research with extensive global experience, has critically analyzed the survey's structure and content as more specifically set forth below. As presented, the survey aimed to gauge public sentiment regarding the proposed upzoning plans. However, our observations and feedback received from members of our organizations suggest that the survey questions were skewed in favor of the Planning Department's agenda. A quote from a resident "*I tried taking the survey - but the slant to approve of the plans was so drastic, that I stopped midway.*" The lack of options for respondents to challenge the proposed changes resulted in some folks expressing opposition in the comment sections only. This limits the Planning Department's ability to quantitatively assess dissenting opinions.

We present our analysis to the Planning Department, City Supervisors, and the Mayor to ensure a comprehensive and unbiased interpretation of the survey results. The Survey's availability to the public ended on January 12, 2024. Despite the Planning

Department's outreach efforts, it's apparent that only a small portion of San Francisco's residents are aware of the substantial changes being proposed. We strongly advocate for the City to undertake a more inclusive public notification process, reaching out to all residents about the ongoing upzoning plans. An updated and more balanced survey is essential to accurately capture the full spectrum of public reactions to these significant urban planning proposals.

Specific Analysis Follows:

It is our opinion that the Survey Monkey survey instrument entitled "Survey for Expanding Housing Choice (Housing Element Zoning Program) Phase 2- Fall 2023", sponsored by the SF Planning Department, is a flawed and self-serving instrument. It is designed to generate responses predetermined to support the Department's objective as stated on their website "... *to expand housing affordability and availability by allowing for increased density throughout the city*".

It is NOT an unbiased questionnaire that reflects actual resident perspectives, thoughts, and concerns based on an informed audience.

The absence of effort on the part of the Department to foster resident awareness and comprehension of this proposal limits the respondent's ability to appropriately understand and react to this UPZONING proposal. The original 3 phases of this program, as described on the Department's website, require community feedback and revisions, but this survey reflects little evidence of that feedback. Fielding a biased survey without context and an informed constituency indicates a lack of transparency that belies the Department's objectives and intentions.

We recommend the results of this survey instrument be disregarded immediately, and less self-serving and biased instruments be appropriately developed, publicly communicated, and fielded.

Some Observations:

1. Speed of Survey Turn-Around, Lack of Public Notice and Absence of Public Awareness.

- a. The Planning Department clearly has a vested interest in obtaining results quickly that will support and drive this program forward.
- b. This has created a situation where City residents have been given inadequate notice and education about the impending UPZONING as delineated and have had little to no ability to provide honest and true feedback on what will certainly affect their housing, their districts, and their lives.
- c. Based on initial negative reactions by community groups, it appears most residents and potential survey respondents HAVE NO IDEA this initiative is underway, have had no access to the map depicting the changed UPZONING, have never been afforded an adequate explanation of UPZONING, or the reasons behind its implications for their neighborhoods and the city's character.

2. This survey has been constructed to be a leading and self-serving instrument. Respondents aren't asked whether they SUPPORT or DO NOT SUPPORT MORE HOUSING in their districts.

- a. This should be an immediate initial segmentation of respondents with appropriate and probing questions following each stream.
- b. This ensures the various streams' thoughts, perspectives, and perceived pros and cons are captured and fully understood.
- c. NOWHERE is there an explanation or description of the Department's intent regarding this survey instrument or its ultimate objective.
- d. NOWHERE are the words UPZONING or REZONING mentioned – potentially leading to confusion, uncertainty, and a tenuous comprehension, if one exists at all, of the Department's objectives.
- e. Respondents are left to try and figure out by themselves what "MORE HOUSING" means vis-à-vis the affected neighborhoods.

3. Besides being a questionnaire which is designed to generate and support the desired responses, this questionnaire is deliberately confusing and deceptive.

- a. As written, the current survey pre-assumes respondents support the premise of MORE HOUSING (as delineated by the map), without providing an opportunity to state a differing viewpoint.
- b. Respondents often find it difficult to answer a question if they do not share the going-in premise that MORE HOUSING (as delineated by the map) is BENEFICIAL.
- c. There is LITTLE opportunity in this survey instrument to voice a dissenting opinion.
 - i. Respondents have no obvious way to submit an opposing viewpoint unless they hijack a question's response box and write in their honest viewpoint there.
- d. By continuing to respond to the questions as written, respondents may think they are sharing their true thoughts and opinions if they do not support MORE HOUSING/UPZONING (as delineated by the map), but in actuality, they are inadvertently supporting the MORE HOUSING/UPZONING platform because of the way the questions are written and responses recorded.

4. Examples of survey questions constructed to elicit a pre-determined outcome in support of Department objectives.

- a. All questions begin from the premise that the respondent supports MORE HOUSING(as delineated by the map).
- b. Q6 and Q7 presume every respondent has housing challenges, setting up a bias toward the Department's predetermined responses.
- c. Q8, Q9, and Q10 presume that respondents believe adding more housing development benefits their neighborhood.
 - i. Instead of asking whether that premise is, in fact, true, Q8 forces respondents to rank order a series of benefits they may consider irrelevant or non-beneficial - yet there is no opportunity to say so.

- ii. Q9 also feeds a series of forced-choice benefits - any one of which supports the Planning Departments' objectives.
 - iii. Q9 does provide an opportunity to check "None of the Above" if these sponsor-supplied benefits do not resonate, but there is no opportunity to write in what the respondent actually feels about MORE HOUSING.
 - iv. Q10 similarly asks open-endedly for any other benefits associated with MORE HOUSING but overtly does not ask for different or opposing opinions
- d. Q11 and Q14 provide no opportunity for respondents to provide input on why they may NOT support more housing or why more housing may be detrimental to their district.
- e. Q16, near the very end of the survey, provides the first direct opportunity to express dissatisfaction with the proposed variables.

There is no genuine listening going on here, only biased data collection to support the desired outcomes. We recommend the results of this survey instrument be disregarded immediately, and less self-serving and biased instruments be appropriately developed, publicly communicated, and fielded.

We are interested to see the results of your survey and the associated comments.

Thank you again for seriously considering our concerns, as they reflect the sentiments of a significant alliance of residents across the city.

Cordially,

Neighborhoods United SF and the following organizations

[\(see the website for the most current list of participation organizations\)](#):

Barbary Coast Neighborhood Association

Cathedral Hill Neighborhood Association

Coalition for San Francisco Neighborhoods
Cow Hollow Association
Cow Hollow Marina Neighbors and Merchants
D4ward
Dolores Heights Improvement Club
East Mission Improvement Association
Francisco Park Conservancy
Geary Boulevard Merchants and Property Owners Association
Golden Gate Valley Neighborhood Association
Laurel Heights Neighborhood Association
Lombard Hill Improvement Association
Mission Dolores Neighborhood Association
Noe Neighborhood Council
North Beach Tenants Association
Pacific Avenue Neighborhood Association
Parkmerced Action Coalition
Planning Association for the Richmond
Russian Hill Community Association
Russian Hill Improvement Association
San Francisco Land Use Coalition
Save Our Neighborhoods SF
St. Francis Homes Association
Sunset Heights Association for Responsible People
Sunset-Parkside Education & Action Committee
Telegraph Hill Dwellers
Waterfront Action Committee

cc: Mayor London Breed (MayorLondonBreed@sfgov.org)
Board of Supervisors (board.of.supervisors@sfgov.org)
Planning Commission (commissions.secretary@sfgov.org)
Mayor's Land Use and Housing Advisor (lisa.gluckstein@sfgov.org)
SF Planning, Principal Planner, Lisa Chen (lisa.chen@sfgov.org)
SF Planning, Acting Director, Joshua Switzky (joshua.switzky@sfgov.org)