Folsom Street has the potential to be the future social and commercial heart of both the Transbay and Rincon Hill neighborhoods, forming a seam that joins the two. An amenity-rich boulevard lined with retail, public services and community space and housing above, Folsom will provide the neighborhoods with a much-needed core.

**DISTRICT OVERVIEW**

Lined with neighborhood-serving retail, restaurants, and services, Folsom Boulevard will provide the two communities with the amenity corridor that every residential neighborhood needs. Not only does Folsom Street run between both neighborhoods, it also links the rest of the South of Market to the waterfront along the Embarcadero, terminating at the new Rincon Park. From the west, the Transbay and Rincon Hill districts are entered on Folsom Street, as it passes under the Bay Bridge off-ramp at Essex Street. What is currently a drab overpass is now in the process of being redesigned by Caltrans. This structure has the potential to become an elegant gateway to the district, framing the vista to the Bay and the Bay Bridge. When one considers the more than 3,000 new dwelling units planned for the publicly-owned parcels in Transbay added to the thousands being planned for Rincon Hill, the great potential to transform Folsom Street into a boulevard and make it come alive with activity becomes clear.

In order to fully transform the street into an inviting, active, amenity-rich boulevard and a notable signature promenade as envisioned, the pedestrian environment must be made dramatically more inviting, and the traffic functions of the roadway mitigated. Wider sidewalks with generous street trees and other streetscape amenities are critical to creating an environment for business and activity to spill out onto the sidewalk and for people to want to stroll and linger. And most importantly, traffic activity must be moderated to encourage a sense of pedestrian safety. This is often achieved by...
providing pedestrian-friendly zones that break up the travel lanes, and reduce the length of travel required to cross the street. Medians, corner bulb-outs, and raised pedestrian crosswalks can help mitigate traffic’s negative effect on the pedestrian experience.

With the growth of the entire South of Market area as a residential and employment neighborhood over the last several years and the current dramatic growth planned, both the Planning Department and Muni have identified Folsom Street as a potential street for a new east-west transit corridor. This new service could take the form of the eastern terminus of the potential Geary light rail line, or a new Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line for the entire South of Market area. Improved transit service such as this will certainly add significant numbers of people to the activity of Folsom Street, adding to its role as the “main street” of the Transbay/Rincon downtown neighborhoods. This concept needs further study, and the street changes necessary to implement a successful new transit service on Folsom Street were not analyzed in the Transbay EIR/EIS; Thus, such a proposal is not included in this Design for Development. However, this potential is recognized for Folsom Street, so as not to preclude such plans in the future.

**STREETS AND OPEN SPACE IMPROVEMENTS**

Streetscape and open space improvements made to transform Folsom into a boulevard will support the high public character of this street and its uses. Based on the results of the traffic analysis conducted for the Transbay EIR/EIS, it will be possible to extend westbound Folsom Street for two additional blocks — from Main Street to Fremont Street. This change will greatly enhance local circulation and navigation and lessen the regional traffic character of the street. In addition, this street will maintain short-term curb parking on both sides to support retail businesses and to buffer pedestrians from traffic. An eastbound bicycle lane will also continue to be provided.

A 15-foot building setback will be maintained on the north side of the street along the entire length of the street in the Project Area. There is a preponderance of vacant, publicly-owned parcels along the north edge of Folsom Street, providing an important opportunity to significantly expand the sidewalk.

Two alternative configurations of Folsom are presented and illustrated in this plan. A number of unresolved issues of both local and wider impact, such as the potential for BRT on Folsom and other technical and cost issues, need to be studied before a streetscape and street configuration scheme for Folsom Boulevard is settled.
ALTERNATIVE ONE:
FOLSOM BOULEVARD WITH MEDIAN

ALTERNATIVE TWO:
FOLSOM BOULEVARD WITHOUT MEDIAN
Folsom Median Configuration

In the first alternative, a tree-lined median is added between the eastbound and westbound lanes, making for a more sheltered and human-scale environment north of the median and giving a grander look to the Boulevard. The street and parking area between the median and sidewalk curb would be treated with textured or other detailed surfaces as part of the pedestrian realm to calm traffic. This creates a 17- to 20-foot sidewalk on the north side, most of it accommodated by the 15-foot building setback. A wider sidewalk is dependent upon slightly narrower travel lane widths. In either case, the ample width on this sunny side of the street creates space for extensive landscaping, furnishings, and businesses and cafes to spill out. The median treatment would create a distinctive character and identity for Folsom Boulevard among Transbay streets. As with any streetscape enhancements, it should be noted that there are technical issues with the maintenance of any planted median that would need to be addressed in a future study.

This boulevard median configuration could, at a later date, be converted to a symmetric “whole” boulevard compatible with the BRT concept, by adding a second median mirroring the first, using road width currently used by the eastbound bike lane (which could move to Howard Street, should that be converted to two-way as well). This long-term concept requires a broader analysis of more widespread SoMa street changes for the downtown neighborhoods not contained in the Transbay EIS/EIR or not possible at a localized Transbay level. As a result, it is not proposed in this plan, though the potential is recognized.

Equal Sidewalks Widening Configuration

In the second alternative, the sidewalks are widened on both sides of the Boulevard. The 15-foot north side setback enables the creation of a generous 22-foot sidewalk on this sunny side of the street for pedestrian and commercial activity. The southern sidewalk, while not within the Project Area, could also be widened to approximately 16 feet and can be furnished with lighting, street trees, seating, and other amenities.
URBAN FORM

Block Layout
Each block, with the exception of that bounded by Beale and Main Streets, will be wrapped with low-rise (four to eight floors) buildings and contain one point tower (25–42 floors) located on a corner. Two blocks also feature mid-rise (14–16) buildings. Buildings along Folsom will be mixed-use with residential units above ground floor, flexible commercial spaces. The blocks are reduced in size and made more walkable by extending east-west Clementina Street, and by creating a new north-south public pedestrian passage linking Folsom Boulevard to Clementina and the new Transbay Square. Open space for the dwelling units on these blocks will take the form of interior-block courtyards, roof gardens, and terraces. The block between Ecker Alley and the Terminal off-ramp contains a building that encroaches into the proposed Boulevard’s pedestrian promenade. The building and the vacant lot adjacent to the ramp could be redeveloped into higher density and set back to fulfill the urban design and development goals of the district.

Neighborhood Retail and the Mews
After full buildout of the Transbay and Rincon Hill neighborhoods, most of Folsom Boulevard between Essex Street and the Embarcadero is envisioned to feature active ground floor retail (similar to traditional neighborhood commercial districts in San Francisco). However, in the interim, to ensure a successful core retail district, the plan concentrates retail along Folsom Boulevard between Beale and Spear Streets and in the pedestrian mews. All the ground floor spaces along Folsom Boulevard will be designed so that they can support retail and commercial uses, so as the neighborhood develops and the new residential base increases market demand, retail can fill these spaces and extend west along Folsom. Until the area matures, these flexible ground floor spaces will be ideal for community and educational facilities, small offices, and public service providers.

The aforementioned Beale/Main block, directly south of Transbay Square, presents a special opportunity to connect these two neighborhood features and create a special retail mews with an intimate physical character. This retail mews builds on successful downtown models, like Maiden Lane, Belden Alley, and Commercial Street, all alleys in dense mixed-use districts that offer inviting, intimate pedestrian environments for dining and shopping along regularly or semi-permanently pedestrianized mid-block allies.

Folsom Boulevard Requirements
- Maintain a solid street wall along the sidewalk.
- Maintain a minimum ceiling height of 15 feet on ground floors for flexible commercial space.
- Maintain 75 percent storefront transparency.
- Institute maximum floor areas and maximum street frontages for businesses to ensure multiple smaller businesses.
An active streetscape along Folsom Boulevard can be achieved with engaging signage, streets furniture and transparent storefronts that open onto the sidewalks. The retail mews, modeled after San Francisco precedents, will also feature a pocket plaza with more generous space for other seating and cafes.
The new Folsom Boulevard will provide an active pedestrian experience with wide sidewalks, shops, and restaurants.