

San Francisco Chronicle

SFCHRONICLE.COM | Saturday, September 11, 2021 | CONTAINS RECYCLED PAPER | \$2.00 ★★★★★

Transbay district community pop-up opens

By John King

At some point in the future, the last empty block in San Francisco's tower-studded Transbay district is expected to hold low-income housing, an upscale residential tower and a large green park.

This weekend's changes are of a much different sort: a handful of food trucks, a beer garden and artificial turf for sports like soccer.

"This area is the city's newest neighborhood, with a burgeoning population, but it doesn't have a place for neighbors to meet and bond,"

The former temporary Transbay terminal on Beale Street in S.F. now hosts the Crossing at East Cut, a pop-up with food trucks, a beer garden and areas to play sports. Fernando Garcia paints in preparation of the opening.

said Andrew Robinson, executive director of the East Cut Community Benefit District, which is funded by tax assessments on landowners on Rincon Hill and in the Transbay area.

The operators of the Crossing at East Cut have permission to continue for at least three years, depending on when developers are ready to break ground. The site sits in the middle of an area that saw a surge in construction during the recent economic boom. The population grew from 4,000 to roughly 11,000

Transbay continues on A6



Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle

Area will later become low-income housing

Transbay from page A1

in the past decade, with at least 20% of the new residences set aside for lower-income residents.

This sort of intervention to activate empty land isn't new to the city: The popular Proxy at Octavia Boulevard and Hayes Street opened in 2011 and still bustles, although the publicly owned site is destined to become low-income housing. Similarly, a fallow block of Mission Bay eventually slated to become a park now holds a locally themed miniature golf course.

But the 3.5-acre Crossing will be San Francisco's largest shot yet of short-term urbanism.

The block bounded by Howard, Main, Folsom and Beale streets held the temporary Transbay terminal from 2010 until 2018 and then was put back into service when its replacement, the Transbay transit center, was closed because of a cracked beam. Since then, the block has sat quiet behind a chain-link fence.

Friday morning, the field of dreams was still a work in progress. There were two street soccer fields with artificial turf on the south half of the block, and a pickle ball court being set up on the north. In between, painters put final touches on the north. In between, painters put final touches on the ground mural by Laura Stevenson that covers the area in the middle of the block where commuters once stood waiting for their buses under palm trees.

The palms are still there. The corrugated service shed

and restrooms are being repainted. The large open bus shelters also remain, in the central clearing that on Friday became a family zone and beer garden.

"We're not trying to erase what was here before," said Kipp Kjeldgaard of Real Active, one of the operators. "We want to draw on all the best qualities that existed — a lot of people have good memories."

Still set to open within the next month are outdoor movies and kiosks holding local restaurants, as well as a dog park along Folsom Street.

The area already has a large public space, of course — the rooftop park of the transit center, which begins near the Crossing's northwest corner. But dogs aren't allowed in the imaginatively landscaped 5.4-acre oasis. Neither are organized sports nor casual ball-throwing.

The city in early June selected the team — which includes Street Soccer USA and Mill Valley developer Nestory Park — to juice up the dormant block. The expectation was that activity would begin by early August, which helps explain the decision to push forward this weekend despite the loose ends.

"I personally feel a lot of obligation to the neighborhood," Robinson said. "There's a sense of urgency."

Among the people pushing for the conversion of the block is Supervisor Matt Haney, who represents this corner of the city.

"We all wanted this to happen quicker, but I'm excited," Haney said. "This is an



The Crossing at East Cut is a 5.4-acre public space in the former temporary Transbay terminal on Beale Street in S.F. Outdoor movies and a dog park are scheduled to be added next month.



Hillary Lauer helps ready the former temporary Transbay terminal in S.F. into the Crossing at East Cut, an urban pop-up.

area with a lot of families, a lot of kids and a lot of traffic. It needs places to go that are active and safe."

The long-term plans are far grander than what will debut.

The Crossing team has a second phase mapped out that would be designed by Populous, a sports-centered architecture firm that also does "temporary activations"

such as Super Bowl Village for the National Football League. Renderings include a lavish performance area cupped against a ridge-like ramp that would arc through part of the block, allowing elevated views of the surrounding towers.

Theoretically, the city's Office of Community Investment and Infrastructure

could give the OK this fall, with the final design and construction taking another six to eight months. But funding would need to include ample sponsorships from business — though Kjeldgaard insisted, "We don't want to overcrowd this or plaster the whole place with the logos."

In the meantime, things will proceed more humbly. One food vendor will be The Lightbox Café, which opened during the pandemic in an office tower across the way on Main Street. The menu there is varied; in the Crossing, the focus will be on tacos and ceviche served from a kiosk that's still being built.

"It's so close, and it's exposure," said Jo Kumery, who owns the daytime spot with Hugo Santana. "We raised our hands and said, 'What can we do to help?'"

John King is The San Francisco Chronicle's urban design critic. Email: jking@sfgchronicle.com Twitter: @johnkingsfchron