




June 6, 2025

TO: MEMBERS, PORT COMMISSION
Hon. Gail Gilman, President
Hon. Stephen Engblom, Vice President
Hon. Willie Adams
Hon. Steven Lee
Hon. Ken McNeely

FROM: Elaine Forbes
Executive Director 

SUBJECT: Informational presentation on Fisherman's Wharf Forward, a plan to engage the community and perform near-term construction of a public plaza and Inner Lagoon berthing improvements as well as a longer-term design process for seismic and flood resilience improvements along the Taylor Street shoreline.

DIRECTOR'S RECOMMENDATION: Information Only – No Action Required

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past two years, the Port's efforts to support the economic recovery of the historic Fisherman's Wharf neighborhood have created tangible results. Now Port staff sees the opportunity to take these efforts to the next step, by removing the former Alioto's restaurant building, an older facility that cannot feasibly be tenanted, and replacing it with a new public plaza that leverages the unique maritime and cultural history and beautiful vistas of this one-of-a-kind location. When finished, the Taylor Street plaza will magnify the impact of the Port's efforts to create new experiences for locals and visitors and, in turn, new business opportunities to serve those visitors and benefit the Port's mission as an enterprise agency.

Looking beyond the delivery of that improvement in summer 2026, Port staff also recognizes that much of the Fisherman's Wharf area is challenged by seismic risks and rising sea levels. Accordingly, Port staff will be pairing the near-term interventions with community engagement to plan and design an investment for a long-term rebuild of the Taylor Street shoreline and improvements to support the fishers for the consideration of the Port Commission, as further described below.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

Enhancements, leasing, and activation of the Taylor Street and Inner Lagoon areas support the Port's Strategic Plan goals:

Economic Vitality

Target strategic Port investments to continue the rebound after the pandemic and associated economic and tourism downturns.

Productivity

Attract and retain tenants to build an economically successful and vibrant waterfront.

Resilience

Reduce seismic and climate change risks to protect the waterfront.

Evolution

Evolve the waterfront to respond to changing public and Port needs.

Engagement

Engage constituents and the public on Port functions and activities.

BACKGROUND

Fisherman's Wharf is home to San Francisco's fishing industry, which includes fishing boats berthed at Fisherman's Wharf's inner and outer lagoons, Hyde Street Fishing Harbor, and fish processors based at Pier 45. Most of this pier is dedicated to fishing industry operations and fish handling businesses that receive, prepare, and distribute seafood throughout San Francisco, the Bay Area, and beyond. Together, these facilities make San Francisco the largest fishing industry center along the California coast.

On the landside, pioneering investments by many family-owned, long-term restaurant and commercial tenants at the Port created not only thriving businesses but also the culture and heart of the Wharf, making it the popular destination it is today. The interplay of the working waterfront, beautiful Bay views, and San Francisco hospitality has created an organic, evolving attraction that has brought generations of visitors to this corner of the City.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic created a major disruption of this ecosystem, forcing restaurant closures under public health orders and creating a challenged operational environment for a long period of time after that. Reductions in tourism also impacted the businesses in the area. The Port instituted "shared prosperity" rent deferral and forgiveness programs intended to assist businesses in reopening their doors but a number of them were unable to do so. The former Alioto's restaurant on Taylor Street was one of the businesses that found itself unable to continue. At the tenant's election Port staff negotiated a lease termination that was approved by the Port Commission and the Board of Supervisors in 2022.

In 2023, Port Commission approved a resolution allowing this vacancy, along with others on Jefferson Street, to be solicited for lease through a retail broker. After solicitation through City Real Estate, Maven was selected as the listing broker. Over the course of 12 months starting in early 2024, and after exhaustive outreach, Maven toured approximately 20 potential tenants through the former Alioto's space and engaged with at least 10 others. Broad feedback was that the investment required for repairs and improvements needed to meet code and Department of Public Health requirements, on top of significant modifications for specialty tenant improvements, made leasing of the space cost-prohibitive or infeasible. Further, the three-story premises and the inefficient facility layout were not aligned with the current market preference for smaller floor plates and a fast-casual dining environment. Maven also solicited for partial or temporary uses (e.g. ground floor only) and while there was additional interest, these opportunities also proved infeasible. After analyzing this feedback with the broker, Port staff developed the strategy laid out below to convert the vacant building into new public space, recognizing that a new public amenity and attraction might enhance lease viability of other neighboring spaces.

The former Alioto's space borders on the Fisherman's Wharf Inner Lagoon, which is the oldest section of the Fisherman's Wharf fishing harbor and is an important operating center for the fishing and excursion fleet. The Inner Lagoon hosts fishers, excursion operators, and classic Monterey fishing vessels. In many ways, this is the iconic identity of the wharf. The current "end tie" configuration of the berths does not meet modern-day requirements and needs for maritime operations and requires investment. The Port intends to make near-term improvements to the lagoon berths to improve operations as well as new lighting to enhance the engaging views. Future improvements to support shoreline resilience will analyze options for a reconfigured harbor that supports and celebrates the fishing industry.

MULTI-HAZARD RISK ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

Over the past decade, Port staff has also been working to understand and address earthquake and flood risks along Port property. The Port appreciates the generosity of the City's voters in passing a general obligation bond to start addressing these risks along the Port's shoreline in 2018. As an initial step after that approval, the Port's Waterfront Resilience Program completed a Multi-Hazard Risk Assessment (MHRA) in 2020. This document was intended to help prioritize Port properties and infrastructure for resilience improvements.

The MHRA noted that Fisherman's Wharf is one of the most densely populated regions of Port property, including large numbers of people at the overwater attractions and restaurants. The MHRA further noted that the older, timber-pile-supported structures in Fisherman's Wharf have a high earthquake risk compounded by unstable soils along the shoreline. These pile-supported structures (including all of Taylor Street) are home to small businesses and workers catering to visitors and residents. While these buildings are still safe to occupy on an ongoing basis from a building code perspective, these structures are vulnerable to strong ground shaking and the lateral spreading expected if a moderate to large earthquake were to take place. The study also noted that coastal flooding is an emerging risk due to accelerating sea level rise.

In light of the above, the Port sees a need to engage the community in planning for shoreline improvements along Taylor Street that would better protect visitors, workers, and public infrastructure in the event of a large earthquake. Design, entitlement, and construction would take several years, as further described below.

FISHERMAN'S WHARF FORWARD

As noted above, the Port has made significant efforts to support the recovery and revitalization of Fisherman's Wharf, which was deeply impacted by the pandemic and continues to face challenges from the City's slow economic rebound and reduced tourism. The Port's tenant relief programs helped many tenants and fishers survive the worst, and now we are doing all that we can to boost visitors and economic activity at this important destination. The Port succeeds when our tenants succeed.

We are proud of the many recent steps that the Port has taken to invest in the Fisherman's Wharf recovery and bring new life to this historic waterfront neighborhood. These include but are not limited to:

- Negotiating a lease with the Skystar Wheel to bring a new attraction to the area.
- Pursuing a new broker-managed offering process that resulted in the approval of new leases at 300 and 340 Jefferson (Everett & Jones and Chasca Rio, respectively).
- Installing a new berthing float at Wharf J-9 off Al Scoma Way, which serves as a first phase of an eventual resilience project to rebuild the seawall and wharf as well as the location of the Port's popular off-the-boat fish sales program and excursions.
- Implementing public realm upgrades at Little Embarcadero.
- Sponsoring pop-up vendor and entertainment activations funded from American Rescue Plan stimulus funds via a grant to the Fisherman's Wharf Community Benefits District (a program that the Port Commission approved extending at its May 13, 2025 meeting).
- Funding dedicated enforcement of unpermitted vending in Fisherman's Wharf by Port and Public Works staff.
- Pursuing fishing industry operational improvements at Pier 45, including a new ice machine and apron improvements to improve the safety and efficiency of receiving fish over the docks.
- Entering exclusive negotiations with Fisherman's Wharf Revitalized LLC for a major investment in a public plaza and visitor-serving uses on the triangle parking lot, and improved attractions and fishing storage space on Pier 45 Sheds A and C.

These foundational Port efforts have moved Fisherman's Wharf in a positive direction. Still, Port staff sees an intensifying need for direct investments in improvements to Fisherman's Wharf to both enhance its current trajectory as well as to build the foundation for its more resilient future. The prime opportunity for this next-level investment lies in engaging the community to initiate three interrelated efforts over the course of the next year:

1. Removing Alioto's Restaurant to create a new public plaza on Taylor Street, and pursuing operational and lighting improvements at the inner lagoon. This would create a better visual connection between the landside and the picturesque inner lagoon maritime operations and scenic points beyond.
2. Exploring whether the improved public realm enhances activation options for Tarantino's, Fisherman's Grotto #9, and surrounding vacancies in the near term.
3. Designing and delivering needed long-term seismic and flood protection improvements along the shoreline of Taylor Street between Jefferson and the Little Embarcadero and investing in further enhancements for the fishing fleet.

These efforts described in more detail below comprise a new phase of this work which we refer to as "Fisherman's Wharf Forward." With the successful completion of the tasks below Port staff anticipates ongoing engagements with the community to plan future resilience improvements paired with public benefits and improved visitor- and resident-serving businesses and attractions.

WORK PLAN

With the above in mind, the Port intends to take the following steps to improve the public realm by next summer as well as to take significant steps on the path towards a long-term investment to address seismic and flood risks while enhancing the built environment and public realm in and around the inner lagoon. Please see Exhibits 1 and 2 for map graphics depicting the items listed below.

Near term (Goal: complete design and implementation by summer 2026):

- Stakeholder engagement regarding plaza amenities and lighting strategies;
- Demolition of Alioto's and construction of a public plaza overlooking the inner lagoon;
- Demolition of red-tagged former Smokehouse facility at the west end of inner lagoon and installation of public overlook on Al Scoma Way;
- Design and installation of operational upgrades plus lighting and other beautification measures for the inner lagoon;
- Soliciting short-term activations or tenants for the former Fisherman's Grotto #9 and Tarantino's restaurant spaces, and exploring other outdoor activation opportunities in this area;

- Initiating a purposeful activation program for the new public plaza to create a new point of interest for the district.

Longer term (Goal: develop actionable project plan by the end of 2027):

- Stakeholder engagement in support of three key design initiatives:
 - Exploration of historic preservation strategy and design of foundation improvements for the portions of Fisherman's Grotto #9 to be preserved, if any;
 - Design of shoreline resilience improvements for Taylor Street and corner of Taylor/Jefferson that would result in an expanded public access area, potentially also including new construction for visitor-serving uses;
 - Design of inner lagoon float/berthing reconfiguration and improvements.
- Develop Port financial strategy to deliver the proposed projects;
- Develop solicitation strategy for tenants/partners for retail spaces being improved or constructed.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The Port has identified an interdivisional project team to manage the work described above. Port staff is currently assembling consultant resources under existing contract vehicles for the near-term tasks listed above and will utilize those resources to begin a public dialogue in the coming weeks regarding the desired plaza amenities and activation strategy. Port staff will also be bringing additional contracting approvals for support on the longer-term tasks noted above to upcoming Port Commission hearings for review and approval.

Port staff is energized at the prospect of creating a new positive change towards a more inviting and resilient Fisherman's Wharf. At the same time, Port staff recognizes that the success of this initiative in such a historic neighborhood will require effective community engagement with all stakeholders. Accordingly, Port staff have engaged with many Fisherman's Wharf stakeholders leading up to this announcement and will broaden that dialogue in the weeks to come.

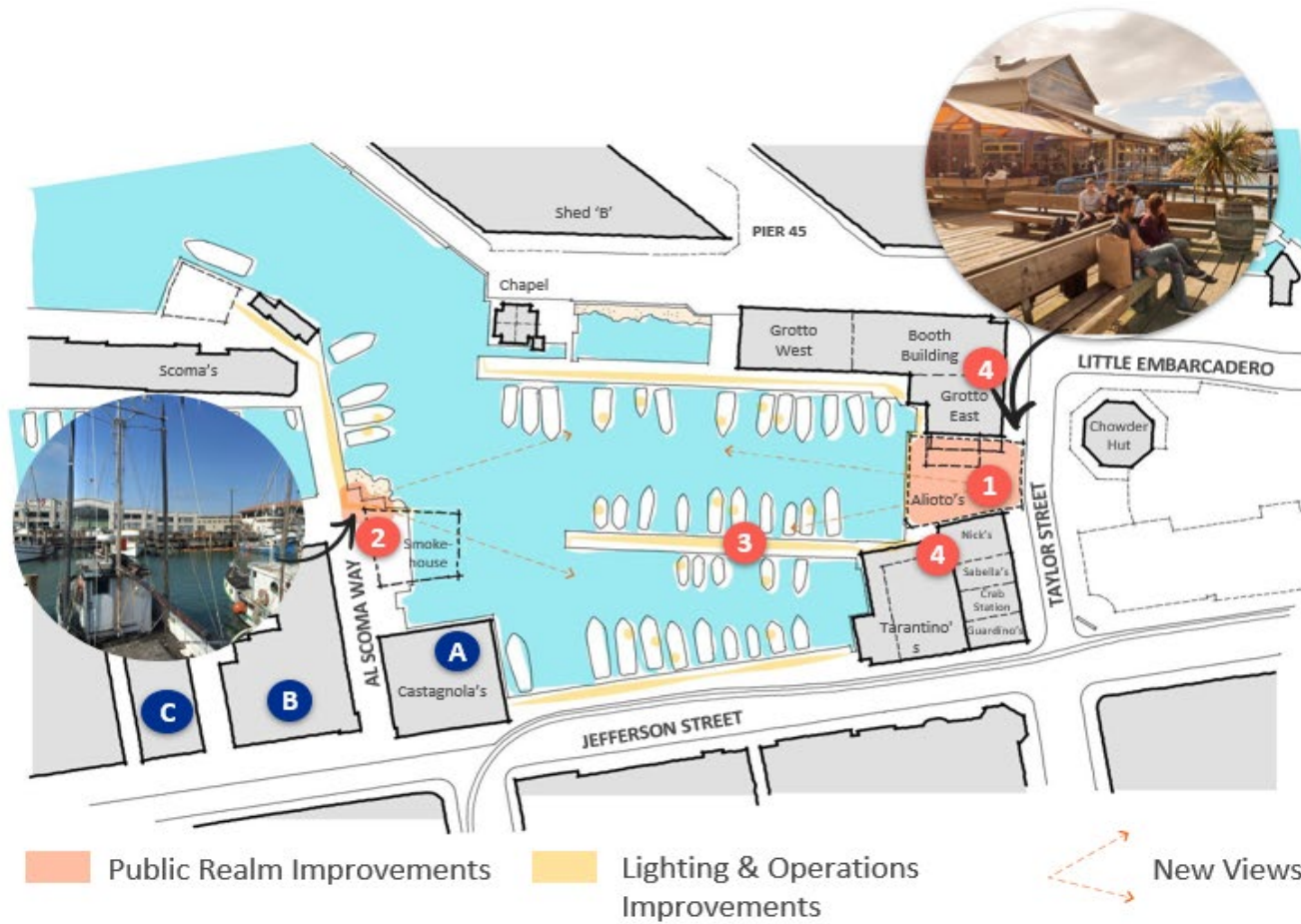
Today we welcome feedback from the Port Commission and members of the public as we embark on the strategy to bring Fisherman's Wharf Forward to life.

Prepared by:

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Attachments: Exhibit 1 – Near-Term Improvements
Exhibit 2 – Longer-Term Conceptual Strategy

Exhibit 1 – Near-Term Improvements



PORT

- 1** New Plaza replacing Alioto's
- 2** New Overlook replacing Smokehouse
- 3** Public Realm **Lighting of Harbor**
- 4** Pop-up **Activations**

NEW OR REOPENED

PORT TENANT RESTAURANTS

- A** Reopen Restaurant
- B** Everett & Jones BBQ
- C** Chasca Rio

Exhibit 2 – Longer-Term Conceptual Strategy

