

THIS PRINT COVERS CALENDAR ITEM NO. : 10.4

**SAN FRANCISCO
MUNICIPAL TRANSPORTATION AGENCY**

DIVISION: Sustainable Streets

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Rescinding the street closure of Russ Street from Minna Street to 76 feet southerly and reopening the street to vehicular traffic.

SUMMARY

- On January 5, 2010, the SFMTA Board approved the street closure of Russ Street from Minna Street to 76 feet southerly to vehicular traffic.
- In 2010, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency's SOMA Alleys Improvement Project created a plaza, named Tutubi Plaza, 76 feet south of the intersection with Minna Street. A significant element of the new plaza was a street print mural on the raised asphaltic concrete plaza surface by the artist Jovi Schnell.
- Within years of opening, the plaza began to attract illegal and dangerous activities and was a haven for homeless encampments and drug users.
- The proposed action will reopen Russ Street south of Minna Street to vehicular traffic at the request of the community.
- Between the spring of 2014 and the fall of 2016, Public Works design and operations teams worked with the community on interim improvements and design alternatives intended to keep the plaza open, and ultimately, when the interim efforts did not solve the problems, designed alternatives for re-opening Russ Street to vehicular traffic.
- In late 2016, the community and City agreed on a preferred option to open Russ Street to vehicular traffic which preserves the street print mural and the raised "T" intersection at Russ and Minna Streets.
- The proposed action is the Approval Action as defined by the S.F. Administrative Code Chapter 31.

ENCLOSURES:

1. SFMTAB Resolution

APPROVALS:

DIRECTOR



DATE

6/14/2017

SECRETARY



6/13/2017

ASSIGNED SFMTAB CALENDAR DATE: June 20, 2017

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PURPOSE

Rescinding the street closure of Russ Street from Minna Street to 76 feet southerly and reopening the street to vehicular traffic.

STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS AND TRANSIT FIRST POLICY PRINCIPLES

This action supports the following SFMTA Strategic Plan Goal and Objectives:

Goal 1: Create a safer transportation experience for everyone

Objective 1.3: Improve the safety of the transportation system.

Transit First Principles

1. To ensure quality of life and economic health in San Francisco, the primary objective of the transportation system must be the safe and efficient movement of people and goods.
2. Public transit, including taxis and vanpools, is an economically and environmentally sound alternative to transportation by individual automobiles. Within San Francisco, travel by public transit, by bicycle and on foot must be an attractive alternative to travel by private automobile.
3. Decisions regarding the use of limited public street and sidewalk space shall encourage the use of public rights of way by pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transit, and shall strive to reduce traffic and improve public health and safety.
5. Pedestrian areas shall be enhanced wherever possible to improve the safety and comfort of pedestrians and to encourage travel by foot.

DESCRIPTION

On January 5, 2010, the SFMTA Board approved the street closure of Russ Street from Minna Street to 76 feet southerly to vehicular traffic. At that time, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency worked to provide higher residential density in the South of Market area. To provide new public open space serving the anticipated new residents, the Agency envisioned a new public plaza along Russ Street for 76 feet at the “T” intersection of Russ and Minna streets as a part of the SOMA Alleys Improvements Project. The plaza was created in conjunction with traffic calming on Minna Street and included planting and bollards to define the street closure, seat walls, new trees, asphaltic concrete paving and street print mural at the sidewalk level by the artist Jovi Schnell, and other improvements.

Within a few years, the residents of the immediate neighborhood noted, documented, and made public illegal and dangerous activities by some people in the plaza. They argued it was the plaza and lack of adjacent active uses that attracted the dangerous and illegal activities. In the spring of 2014 Supervisor Kim and Public Works Director Mohammed Nuru jointly commit to keeping the plaza open while addressing the community’s concerns. Immediately Public Works Operations crews increased routine cleaning and maintenance of the plaza. The Public Works Design Team began to explore ways in which the plaza could be programmed for positive uses and remain flexible even to allow emergency vehicles to pass through.

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Between the spring of 2014 and the summer of 2015, Public Works participated in several community meetings and met with community stakeholders presenting multiple design options for programming the plaza while allowing for emergency vehicle access through the plaza. Simultaneously, Public Works Design and Operations staff worked together to make interim improvements within the plaza in an attempt to discourage illegal activities there but these actions were not successful.

In September 2016, Public Works Director Nuru and Supervisor Kim agreed the street should be reopened to vehicular traffic. The Public Works design team immediately began identifying two options for allowing automobile traffic back on Russ Street. In late 2016, the community and City agreed on a preferred option which preserves the street print mural and raised “T” intersection at Russ and Minna Streets. To that end, SFMTA staff has worked with Public Works staff and the Fix It Team of the Mayor’s Office to bring legislation to re-open Russ Street to vehicular traffic.

Specifically, the SFMTA proposes the following:

A. RESCIND – STREET CLOSURE - Russ Street from Minna Street to 76’ southerly

This proposal will improve pedestrian safety by removing a plaza design that had encouraged illegal and dangerous activities by some people in the plaza.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Between 2014 and 2017, a number of meetings took place to discuss issues with the plaza and how to possibly mitigate them. Starting in 2014, Public Works met with Supervisor Kim to discuss the area, then held or attended a number of community meetings up to August 2015. These meetings included two community meetings, a meeting with the Sixth Street Neighborhood Consortium, South of Market Health Center, and Asian Neighborhood Design. In January 2017, another community meeting was held along with a meeting with Mayor Lee’s Fixit Team to pursue the re-opening Russ Street.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Alternative 1. A “No Build” alternative was rejected given the community’s demand for a change.

Alternative 2. Maintain the public open space but allow for other programming options. Three options were presented to the Community:

- A. Art Alley, a fenced and gated plaza that enhanced existing art murals with more of the same and provided created programming options including outdoor films and concerts.
- B. Micro-Gardens, a series of postage stamp community garden plots rather than a plaza. Community Gardens are successful open space options for troubled urban spaces.
- C. Café Street, a plaza that allowed for food trucks (or other portable services) to stop and provide a way for neighbors to gather for positive uses.

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All options allowed for emergency vehicle pass through where that was not an option in the original design.

Alternative 3. Re-open Russ Street and restore roadway and curbs to previous condition.

As part of the final reopening to automobile traffic process, Public Works explored another option that removed the elevated ac paving at sidewalk level and restored curbs and gutters that aligned with those existing on the rest of Russ Street. This alternative was rejected because it would demolish the valued Street art mural by artist Jovi Schnell.

FUNDING IMPACT

Re-opening of Russ Street (aka Tutubi Plaza Improvements Project) to vehicular traffic will cost approximately \$125,000. Public Works has committed the funding for this project.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The proposed re-opening of Russ Street to vehicular traffic is subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). CEQA provides a categorical exemption from environmental review for operation, repair, maintenance, or minor alteration of existing public facilities including existing highways and streets, sidewalks, gutters, bicycle and pedestrian trails, and similar facilities as defined in CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 Class 1(c).

On April 25, 2017, the Planning Department determined (Case Number 2017-005084ENV) that the proposed re-opening of Russ Street to vehicular traffic is categorically exempt from CEQA as defined in CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 Class 1(c).

A copy of the CEQA determination is on file with the Secretary to the SFMTA Board of Directors, and may be found in the records of the Planning Department at 1650 Mission Street in San Francisco, and is incorporated herein by reference. The proposed action is the Approval Action as defined by the S.F. Administrative Code Chapter 31.

OTHER APPROVALS RECEIVED OR STILL REQUIRED

The City Attorney has reviewed this item. No other approvals are required.

RECOMMENDATIONS

SFMTA staff recommends that the SFMTA Board of Directors rescind the closure of Russ Street from Minna Street to 76 feet southerly and reopen the street to vehicular traffic.

SAN FRANCISCO
MUNICIPAL TRANSPORTATION AGENCY
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
RESOLUTION No. _____

WHEREAS, The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency is committed to working with San Francisco Public Works and the Fix It Team of the Mayor's Office; and,

WHEREAS, The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency promotes pedestrian safety and agrees with the assessment that Russ Street should be re-opened to discourage illegal and dangerous activities associated with the current Tutubi Plaza design on Russ Street south of Minna Street; and,

WHEREAS, The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency has agreed to re-open Russ Street as follows:

A. RESCIND – STREET CLOSURE - Russ Street from Minna Street to 76' southerly;

WHEREAS, The proposed project to re-open Russ Street is subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); CEQA provides an exemption from environmental review for operation, repair, maintenance, or minor alteration of existing public facilities including existing highways and streets, sidewalks, gutters, bicycle and pedestrian trails, and similar facilities as defined in CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 Class 1(c); and,

WHEREAS, On April 25, 2017, the Planning Department determined that the proposed re-opening of Russ Street is categorically exempt from CEQA, pursuant to Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations Section 15301(c); and,

WHEREAS, The proposed action is the Approval Action as defined by the S. F. Administrative Code Chapter 31; and,

WHEREAS, A copy of the CEQA determination is on file with the Secretary to the SFMTA Board of Directors, and may be found in the records of the Planning Department at 1650 Mission Street in San Francisco, and is incorporated herein by reference; and,

WHEREAS, The public has been notified about the proposed modifications and has been given the opportunity to comment on those modifications through the public hearing process; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency Board of Directors approves the traffic modification set forth in item A above on Russ Street from Minna Street to 76 feet southerly to reopen the street to vehicular traffic.

I certify that the foregoing resolution was adopted by the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency Board of Directors at its meeting of June 20, 2017.

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Secretary to the Board of Directors
San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency