

08-22-23 | 7:00 AM

This ambitious plan would revitalize downtown San Francisco to end its ‘doom loop’

Sitelab’s plan to remake downtown San Francisco is a winner of the 2023 Innovation by Design Awards.

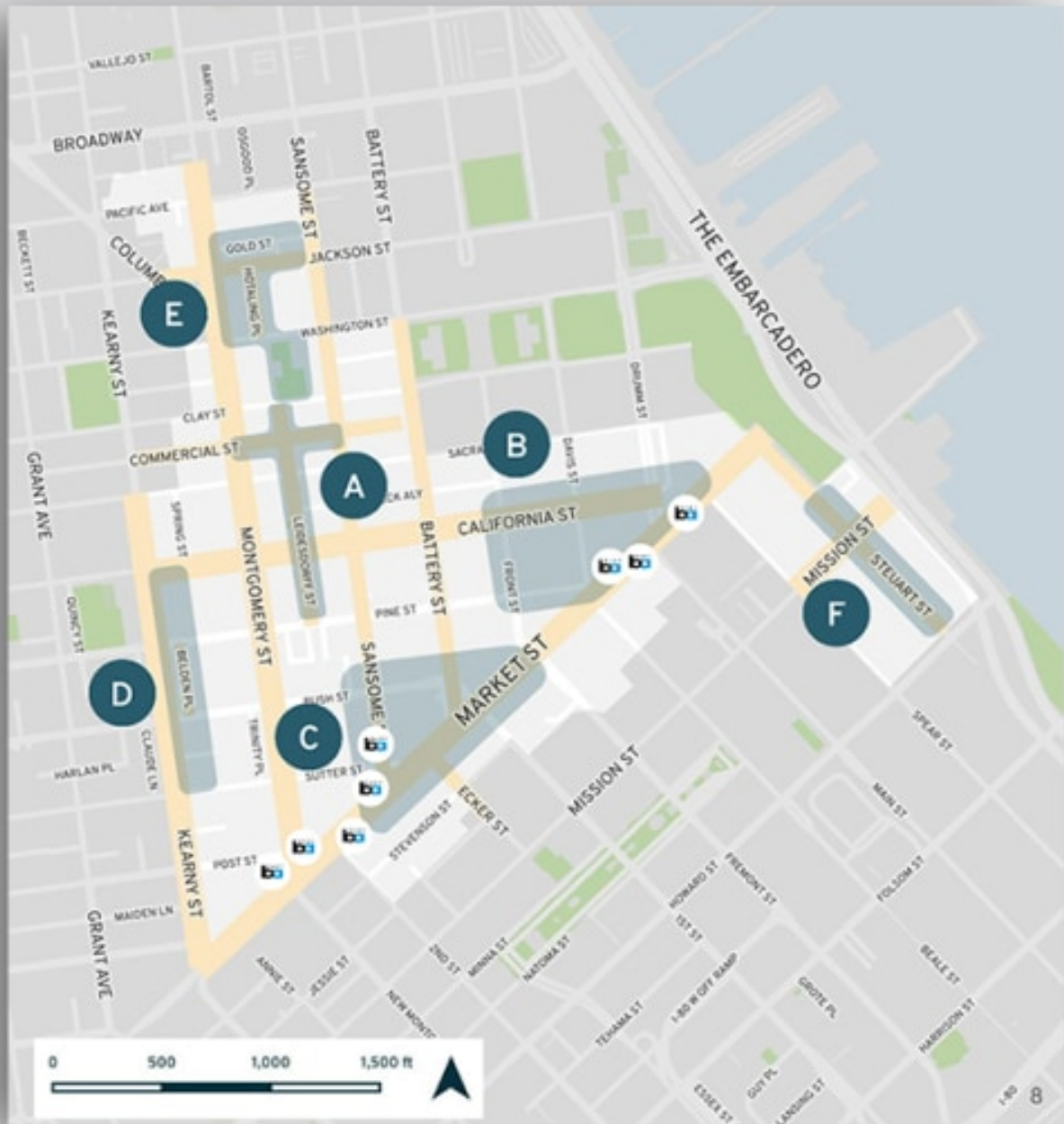


BY REBECCA BARKER

1 MINUTE READ

It’s easy to assume San Francisco is trapped in a so-called doom loop. The city has struggled to bounce back from the COVID-19 pandemic as it battles [high office-vacancy rates](#), increased crime and public drug usage, and an unprecedented number of shuttering businesses.

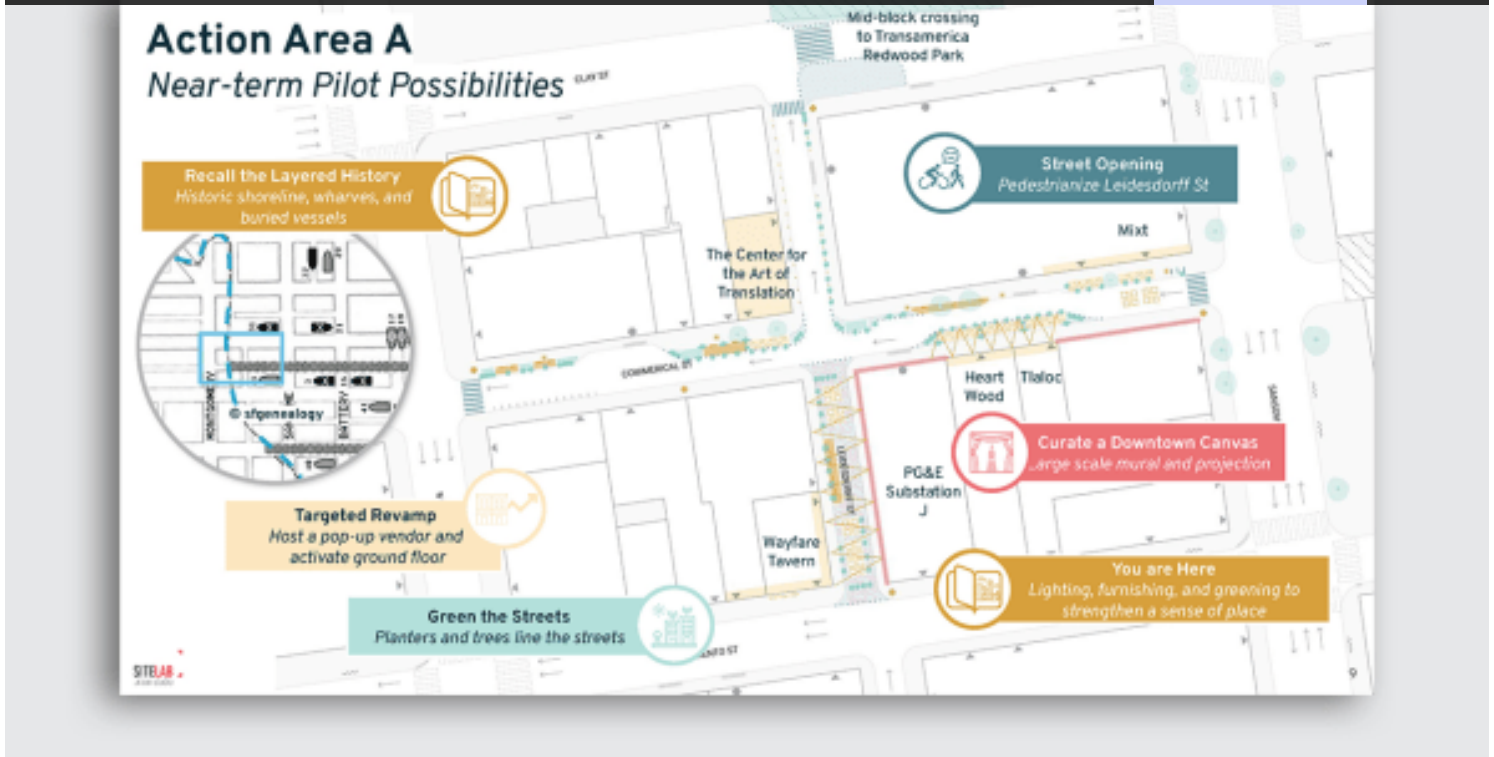
To combat those issues, the urban design studio, [Sitelab](#), partnered with the nonprofit Downtown SF Partnership to create a Public Realm Action Plan (PRAP) that reimagines the future of the city’s downtown.



[Image: Sitalab]

“In some ways, San Francisco is a barometer,” says Laura Crescimano, cofounder of Sitalab. “Some of that I actually embrace because it means San Francisco is less likely to follow the status quo.”

Originally published in July 2022, the PRAP—winner of the Pandemic Action category for Fast Company’s [2023 Innovation by Design Awards](#)—identified 6 areas of focus that would make the 43 blocks encompassing the city’s Financial District and Jackson Square “a place to be.” To develop the PRAP, Sitalab surveyed more than 800 people, who weighed in on what they wanted to see happen to the neighborhood.



[Image: Sitalab]

Efforts to reinvigorate the area have hinged on urban design. For example, Crescimano noted that San Francisco’s grid was built before cars existed. Sitalab and Downtown SF have used the city’s history to inform the plan’s action areas, such as increasing accessibility for pedestrians.

Crescimano and Downtown SF deputy director Claude Imbault are hoping that one of the PRAP’s main projects, Landing at Leidesdorff, will launch this September. The initiative, described as a “reimagined downtown experience for San Franciscans,” will focus on filling alleyways or unused public spaces with pop-ups and vendors, partnering with local restaurants and musicians, and painting murals in accessible areas.

“This is not just about making pretty streets [or] hanging flower baskets,” Imbault says. “This is real economic recovery.”

This story is part of Fast Company’s [2023 Innovation by Design Awards](#). Explore the full list of companies creating products, reimagining spaces, and working to design a better world. Read more about the [methodology behind the selection process](#).



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