

# The urban design element of the san francisco general plan

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Introduction Definition: The theory of urban design element involves various aspects critical in the accomplishment of basic and functional components of a normal operating city. Several theories have been formulated to explain the importance of the application of design elements during planning of any city framework since the urban and city development arena. Among key designers associated with the advancement of the urban design elements that are applicable and necessitate basic town requirements is Kevin Lynch. According to Kevin Lynch (1960), “ There seems to be a public image of any given city which is overlap of many individual images. Or perhaps there is a series of public images each held by some significant number of citizens.

Such group images are necessary if an individual is to operate successfully within his environment and to cooperate with his fellows. Each individual picture is unique, with some content that is rarely or never communicated, yet it approximates the public image, which is different environments more or less compelling, more or less embracing” (p. 99). Objective: The objective of this paper is to incorporate Kevin Lynch’s model into the contemporary urban design element of San Francisco town. This will entail bringing to focus some of the important entities, which a well designed or poorly design urban setting offers to the local community living in the town. These entities are essentially aimed at satisfying the local community, which depends on the basics provided by the town in terms of fulfilling social, economic, spiritual, and physical functions of their lives.

These aspects form critical elements regarding the quality of life of individuals of the affected community. Therefore, the main aim of the urban design element according to Kevin Lynch’s concepts is to create an

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environment that enables individuals to achieve their potentials in regard to the desired quality of life. Contemporary Elements of Urban Design The basic elements of urban design found in the contemporary and majority of urban settings include buildings, public space, streets, transport, and landscape. The aim of design is to elementally incorporate all these aspects into a design structure, which is organized into a coherent and functional structure (Woodrose, 2003). The functional element, which comes into play in arranging a critical and unique urban design structure, involves the following key design inputs and processes: order, balance, scale, unity, proportion, symmetry, hierarchy, rhythm, context, detail, harmony, contrast, and beauty. These form the key design targets of any futuristic component of an individual plan (Woodrose, 2003).

Historical Perspective of the Francisco General Plan The San Francisco urban design plan was officially formulated back in 1972 with a simple outset of events incorporated by the then designers. The plan consisted of keenly chosen design principles and fundamental design elements included therein in the plan through discreet policy formulation. “ These objectives, policies, and principles are simultaneously broad and specific as they intend to respond to, and provide guidance for, a foreseeable range of specific they intended to respond to, and provide guidance for, a foreseeable range of physical development questions that might face the city” (Rose, 2010). The fundamentals of the plan according to its first creators were not solving future problems regarding development and the consequent emancipation of community activities in the individualistic form. Analysis of the urban design element of the San Francisco General Plan Using Kevin Lynch Framework and <https://assignbuster.com/the-urban-design-element-of-the-san-francisco-general-plan/>

Formal Design Essentials. According to Kevin Lynch (1960), “ The contents of the city images so far studied, which are referable to physical forms, can conveniently be classified into five types of elements: paths, edges, districts nodes, and landmarks...” (p.

99). An analysis of San Francisco general plan involve an outlook on several key and critical feature, which elementally include land use element, plan sub-areas element, transportation element, parks, public facilities, and services, economic development element, open space and conservation element, health and safety element, noise element, and housing element. All these aspects form critical considerations in the formulation of the ultimate urban design element of the town. Nature Factors and Main Purpose The San Francisco urban framework has been designed with an aim of establishing the resulting relationship between the physical aspects and resultant interactions with people and their environment. “ San Francisco’s environment is magnificent, and the city is a great city, but the unique relationships of natural setting and man’s past creations are extremely fragile.

There are constant pressures for change, some for growth, some for decay” (City & County of San Francisco, 2009). Kevin Lynch gives a critical description of the critical elements involved when considering nature elements in a contemporary urban design framework. He gives a description of the manner in which urban design elements needs to integrate functions of development and preservation while putting in concerted efforts in recognizing those aspects which serve to combine main attribute of the city

in total recognition of the environmental framework. This is supported by the City and County of San Francisco which states, “ It is a concerted effort to recognize the positive attributes of the city, to enhance and conserve those attributes, and to improve the living environment where it less than satisfactory” (City & County of San Francisco, 2009). San Francisco City Pattern Paths and Order The element of order has been enhanced within the city framework and policy guidelines through the formulation and creation of specific guidelines streamlining the need for orderly life in the city span. The essence of order in the town has been created through provision of streets and roadways aimed at creating orderly movement and access fundamentals.

According to Kevin Lynch (1960), “ Paths are channels along which the observer customarily, occasionally, or potentially moves. They may be streets, walkways, transit lines, canals, railroads” (p. 99). The manner in which San Francisco urban design is made gives provision for access by the wide community that accrues significant benefits from the city by utilizing streets and roadways. Furthermore Lynch attests that, “ People observe the city while moving through it, along these paths the other environmental features are arranged and relatedrdquo; (Lynch, 1960). These forms further confirms the aspect of order in regard to San Francisco, which has key environmental and structural entities of the city arranged along its critical access zones with a view of affirming its traditional design elements.

This informs the reason as to why front yards in San Francisco are not a necessity in most parts of the city while creating sense of enclosure as rows

of buildings are essentially located next to sidewalks (City & County of San Francisco, 2009). (City & County of San Francisco, 2009) This map showing different streets and access roads arrangements create a significant order in the town apart from serving their sole purpose of acting as key access roads as seen in the different settings taking consideration of the contextual variations and other factors inclusive. In addition, according to San Francisco's principles of city patter, " The pattern of major streets can be more visible and apparent to users of the street system of the landscaping and lighting of major streets is different from that of local streets" (City & County of San Francisco, 2009). Balance The manner in which the urban design of San Francisco has been arranged gives provision for achievement of balance on its critical city components. The aim of doing this is to achieve an integration of the city components with other functional units, which form the riding force for formulating the plan and its policies governing the jurisdiction of the all the key activities. The buildings and other key physical structures are balanced across the entire landscape with consideration of different patterns involved in the formation of a city borderline of activities.

" People also have to understand their city, its logic and its means of cohesion. They need to know where to find activities and how to reach their destinations in shopping areas, downtown, at institutions and at places of entertainment and recreation" (City & County of San Francisco, 2009). This elementally shows the manner in which key operations of the city have been balanced to achieve the city prospects by creating cohesion of nature, design, functions, and people. This factors fall in line with Lynch's view of a well balanced city plan, through consideration of all the critical components

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in the framework of a city design. Districts Lynch defines districts as, “medium to large sections of the city, conceived of as having two dimensional extents, which the observer mentally enters ‘inside of’, and which are recognizable as having some common, identifying character” (Lynch, 1960).

This definition holds for San Francisco since the town has an adequate provision of such sections within its city framework with an aim of developing dividing sections of the city into distinct localities. This enables easy execution of critical administrative functions associated with the city elements. “Most people structure their city to some extent in this way, which individual differences as to whether paths or districts are the dominant elements” (Lynch, 1960). Going by Lynch’s deliberations the fundamental aim of dividing a city into these clusters is to enhance an exterior reference of the defined location while showing critical administrative points. Nodes and Proportion According to Lynch (1960), “Nodes are points, the strategic spots in a city into which an observer can enter, and which are the intensive foci to and from which he is travelling. They may be primarily junctions, places of a break in transportation, a crossing or convergence of paths, moments of shift from one structure to another” (p.

99). Looking at the general plan of the San Francisco city one immediately gets the idea of a city well endowed in the aforementioned component regarding nodes provision throughout its urban element and city framework. This can be seen in many instances in some of the prominent and strategically located building and structures for that sole purpose, for example, the Bay Bridges, the Golden Gates, the Palace of Fine Arts, City

College, and Coit Tower. " People perceive this pattern from many places and during many activities: from their homes and neighborhoods, from parks and shoreline during recreation, from places of work, from streets while traveling, and from entranceways and observation points while visiting the city" (City & County of San Francisco, 2009). These structures therefore act as key guiding structures as a visitor to the city traverses the city line borders for either recreational or business activity and is hence essential in representative outposts both in its elemental design and strategic location. In addition, the incorporate elements of visibility from all angles making them useful structures in the overall landscape design.

As Kevin Lynch put it, " Some of these concentration nodes are the focus and epitome of a district, over which their influence radiates and of which they stand as a symbol. They may be called cores" (Lynch, 1960). For instance, some of the structures like Coit Tower bore this fundamental description. Furthermore, Kevin illustrates that nodes are similar to the ' districts' concept because of the fact that they form the polarizing center of the city in mention, San Francisco (Lynch, 1960). Edges and Symmetry In most city settings, the fundamental aim of creating edges is to achieve a desired form of symmetry throughout the futuristic city framework.

Lynch defines edges as, " Edges are the linear elements not used or considered as paths by the observer. They are the boundaries between two phases, linear breaks in continuity: shores, railroad cuts, edges of development, walls. They are lateral references rather than coordinate axes" (Lynch, 1960). The emancipation of linear component in the framework of



the town is important especially in creating the required symmetry through which most other structures are lined or located upon. In the urban design fundamentals of San Francisco, the town has a distinct plan of edges establishment matching Lynch's definition of edges. " Visually prominent features such as hills, roadways and large groves of trees often identify the edges of districts and neighborhoods.

Although these features should not be regarded as barriers to movement from one area to another, they do have the advantage of creating an awareness of districts and neighborhoods within the total city patter" (City & County of San Francisco, 2009). This serves to show the manner in which the governing council of San Francisco gives prominence to the significance of natural boundaries represented by edges. " The uses and benefits of the city pattern are many and profound. This pattern is, first of all, bound up in the image and character of the city. To weaken or destroy this pattern would make San Francisco a vastly different place" (City & County of San Francisco, 2009).

The essence of creating these borders is essentially to encompass all the critical elements of symmetry in order to contain the development initiatives along a certain distinct pattern without incorporating interference with other forms or structure of the city going by its 1972 design. Rhythm & Harmony. The urban design element of San Francisco appears to create the desired rhythm based on the general plan of the town in which its different structural components appear to flow in a significant manner in total consideration of accompanying design principles. " Provides organization and measured

relationships that give a sense of place and purpose and reduce the degree of stress in urban life. Outlook upon a pleasant and varied pattern provide for an extension of individual consciousness and personality, and give a comforting sense of living with the environment” (Rose, 2010). In addition, this is further supported by the element provided by the effect resulting from creating of edges to enhance symmetry in essence.

Landmarks and Beauty Lynch defines landmarks as, “ Landmarks are another type of point reference, but in this case the observer does not enter within them, they are external. They are usually a rather simply defined physical object: building, sign, store, or mountain. Their use involves singling out of one element from a host of possibilities” (Lynch, 1960). Landmarks in San Francisco have been strategically used to determine the location of certain structures in order to ensure their interrelationship with the surrounding and human elements is that of generating aesthetic value. The manner in which buildings are constructed takes into account critical fundamentals regarding suitable location and proximity to adjacent properties. “...People in San Francisco are accustomed to a skyline and streetscape of buildings that harmonize in color, shape, and details” (Rose, 2010).

This creates the element of association through consideration of human factors. In addition, “ These buildings characterize the mood and institutions of the city, and by their quality and nature express the city’s aspirations to the world at large” (Rose, 2010). Buildings are essentially built to characterize the various environmental dispositions, which are existing

depending upon the guiding factors. “ The function and beauty of natural areas are significantly diminished by the intrusion of traffic ways, parking lots and buildings. These facilities detract less when located in areas that have already been built upon or otherwise developed” (City & County of San Francisco, 2009).

Among areas and structural facilities in San Francisco providing critical landmarks and acting as lasting symbols of beauty in San Francisco include the Russian Hill, the Pacific Heights, the Dolores Heights, Buena Vista and Upper Market, and Telegraph Hill. The telegraph hill, for instance, is an essentially a hilltop having green trees which are visible with Coit Tower rising high up like a mast (City & County of San Francisco, 2009). In addition, it has unique low buildings having flat roofs matching the effect of downtown, and has distinct cliffs, stairs, and walkways next to the waterfront where building perch in a precarious manner along slopes and trees (City & County of San Francisco, 2009). Landmarks and Historical Benefits The role played by landmarks in enhancing the critical importance of certain building is of major concern to San Francisco’s governing authority. “ Historical buildings represent crucial links with past events and architectural styles and when preserved, afford educational, recreational, cultural, and other benefits” (City & County of San Francisco, 2009). The aims of these types of landmarks are to preserve the image of the city at a certain time.

As Kevin Lynch describe the importance of landmarks in a city arrangement, this is essentially achieved considering the contextual differences availed by the framework of San Francisco, for instance, historical buildings in San

San Francisco have been preserved as critical landmarks in order to introduce a sense of continuity with the past elements. Urban Design Element: Neighborhood Environment & Personal Safety There are various fundamental aspects which are covered in regard to personal safety considerations while designing critical facilities. The urban design elements are essentially made to enable the coordination of activities of humans while safeguarding against potential harm occurring to them. Through promoting human accessibility options by providing different access points for humans and traffic the concept of safety is therefore enhanced and a major factor in since its inception in 1972. "The people of San Francisco are the city's reason of being and its hope for the future. Most residents live in areas that can be characterized as distinct neighborhoods, and the quality is of overriding importance to the individual, since the most basic human needs must be satisfied" (Rose, 2010).

This matches the underpinnings and provisions for urban design on which Kevin Lynch design goals and objectives emanate from and act as the guiding principles throughout the formulation of his concepts, ideas, and principles. The aim is to further achievement of human factors, which is also a goal of design. Conclusion The overriding effect of the critical urban design elements deserves prominence over all other factors that come into play when conceptualizing the operational factors of a city design. San Francisco is one such city in which its urban design elements serve its purposes according to its original creators back in 1972. The design aspect of the city has taken the city beyond imaginative grounds in terms of actualizing most of its critical functions. The design elements fit the criteria provided by Kevin

Lynch which encompass basic city physical forms, which are buildings, public space, streets, transport, and landscape all of which have been well designed to ensure provision of paths, nodes, edges, and districts.

This is further streamlined through the provision of critical policy formulation objectives aimed at fulfilling the aforementioned design principles.

Furthermore, the design aims at strengthening other human factors in its actualization of services needed by the local community and increasingly the number of visitors frequent most of its prominent sites. The urban design element therefore satisfies the provisions proposed by Kevin Lynch in regard to urban design element.