

PREFACE

GOLDEN GATE NEIGHBORHOOD CONDITIONS

Since I began as a resident cultural researcher at the Golden Gate Branch Library four years ago, I've heard rumors of a mysterious file cabinet in the basement. For long as anyone could remember, the cabinet remained locked with its unknown contents sealed away. Though the file cabinet technically belongs to the Friends of the Golden Gate Library, no one could track down the key. The Friends, a small but dedicated group of neighborhood volunteers, have organized an extremely popular free summer jazz concert series at the library for nearly three decades.

The concert series, born out of an informal jam session, began in earnest at the Golden Gate Library in 1993. Under the direction of nonagenarian Josephine Lee, a neighborhood activist and resident since the 1960s, the eight-part series draws standing-room only crowds on Sundays. Many who grew up in the neighborhood and have since moved make an annual pilgrimage to the Golden Gate Library from as far as Vallejo. A dedicated toe-tapping and head-bobbing crowd revels in the sounds. While the opening set features local jazz musicians with long-standing ties to the community, youth musicians take the stage for the second set.

In 2017 Sharon Vaughn, a Golden Gate librarian since the early 2000s and Friends group liaison, shared big news: she found the key. Curious and eager, we explored the cabinet's drawers, an unintended time capsule. Folders in no apparent order contained Friends of the Golden Gate Library's well-documented meeting minutes, neighborhood newsletters and event flyers. This robust report was tucked among hand-written notes.

Golden Gate Neighborhood Conditions was created by UC Berkeley urban planning students in 2001. It is the second such neighborhood report I've recovered that takes a deep dive into the community's strengths and challenges. Over the course of two months, twenty would-be community designers met with neighbors young and old, analyzed data and proposed recommendations for neighborhood revitalization. Their conceptual sketches proposed uses for the area's many empty lots, strategies to increase communication among neighborhood groups and organizations and ways to leverage city resources for neighborhood improvements. While the neighborhood has changed since the writing of this report two decades ago, many of the same questions and issues persist.

Gaining permission to re-print this report has been a journey of its own. Through multiple emails with staff at UC Berkley's School of Environmental Design, I learned that this report is an 'orphan document.' Since it was written by a group of students as a class project, no one owns it. As a first step, I contacted the lead instructor for the project, the urban designer and architect Neema Kudva. Now associate professor of city and regional planning at Cornell University, she immediately responded to my email request for permission to re-print:

I am writing to you from India, and it does feel strange to see pages from a long-ago project on my computer screen. This workshop has a special place in my life trajectory -- it was the first time I was involved in a course like this; my daughter, who arrived five weeks early, came days before our final meeting and the students baby-sat her in shifts through the presentations! We left the Bay Area for Cornell soon after, which was unfortunate because it meant that we could not take the project forwards, and it joined other studies languishing in file cabinets in corners of storage rooms.

Daylighting this material extends its potential to inform and benefit local residents, activists and researchers alike, one of our priorities for developing the Golden Gate Library Local Collection.

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