Introducing the Bay Area Metro Center...

Where the Region Comes Together.

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The Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) was created to protect and enhance San Francisco Bay and to encourage responsible use of this regional treasure. BCDC also leads the Bay Area’s ongoing regional effort to address the impacts of rising sea levels on shoreline communities and assets.

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Thank you to the following organizations and individuals for their contributions to this issue:

Blake Marvin Photography

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On Earth Day in 2010, four high-profile regional agencies joined forces to launch a new initiative to create a more livable, sustainable Bay Area in the face of population and traffic growth, economic uncertainties, and serious environmental threats.

The partners in this game-changing campaign are the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (Air District), the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC), and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC).

Covering transportation and housing, land use and open space, air quality and climate change—and the health of our defining natural feature, the great San Francisco Bay—these four agencies are working hard to build a Bay Area that not only will survive the challenges ahead, but will thrive and remain a formidable contender in the ever more competitive global marketplace.

The collaboration responds to a state mandate, Senate Bill 375, which requires California’s metro areas to take aggressive action to promote sustainable travel and growth patterns and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The effort also builds on a long history of homegrown public policy advances designed to preserve and enhance the region’s bountiful natural assets and unique quality of life.

As one of their first orders of business, the regional agencies embarked on something both concretely physical and symbolic: a joint headquarters for their activities at 375 Beale Street in downtown San Francisco’s burgeoning Rincon Hill neighborhood. Blossoming in the shell of a largely vacant government building built in the 1940s, our new headquarters brings the regional agencies’ offices under one roof to foster even greater collaboration and achieve significant operational efficiencies as well.

With a new look inside and out and a new name—the Bay Area Metro Center—the facility serves as a forum where public officials, stakeholders and staff can address climate change and other pressing public policy issues in a comprehensive way.
Looking Back
In a dynamic, urban landscape, few buildings meet the needs of a changing society, and many must make way for new structures. An exception, 375 Beale Street has survived and been adapted from a major military supply depot to a Marine Corps dormitory to a regional U.S. Postal Service facility and now, after a period of near vacancy, has morphed again—into the home for four major Bay Area regional agencies.

A Building of Many Uses
While the structure has adapted to a variety of government uses for the military, U.S. Postal Service, U.S. Mint and U.S. Treasury, its mid-20th century style—represented by clean, horizontal lines and lack of ornamentation—has remained largely intact over the last 70 years.

Workhorse Neighbors
Between 1933 and 1943, two important structures were built in record time to fill vital needs—the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge and its neighbor, the building now known as 375 Beale. Both are notable for their no-nonsense, “workhorse” functionality and lasting durability, and their proximity to each other provided a strong symbiosis of warehouse activities and easy transportation access.

Meeting Wartime Needs
Completed in 1943, this sturdy, capacious warehouse with its vast, open floor plans (shown here) served the needs of the U.S. military through three wars—World War II and the Korean and Vietnam conflicts—providing a vital supply link for American soldiers in the Pacific.

Women Report for Duty
During World War II, members of the U.S. Marine Corps Women’s Reserve reported for duty to the San Francisco military complex that included a supply depot at this building. With a motto of “Free a Marine to Fight,” they performed jobs from typing, posting records and drafting blueprints to driving tractors and installing radios in tanks.

Reviving “Dead” Letters
In the 1960s, the building became a regional U.S. Post Office center, eventually handling over 10 million undeliverable dead letters and parcels per year. Before giving up on delivery, however, qualified postal workers opened unaddressed or misaddressed mail to look for addresses inside.

Bay Area Metro Center
HQ for “North Pole” Mail
As a regional postal center for many years, the building met a special need every year for letters addressed to Santa Claus. Many of the hand-scribbled letters were answered by San Francisco volunteers, saying Santa would do his best; some volunteers actually fulfilled children’s wish lists.
Airy Atrium
To bring natural light into the massive, 64,000-square-foot floor plate — and reduce energy costs — architects carved an eight-story atrium into the center of the building, topping it with a lightweight “pillow” skylight made of transparent plastic sheeting filled with air. At the street level, the atrium is the centerpiece of an expansive lobby destined to become an indoor crossroads for the four regional agencies occupying the building. Above the lobby, the atrium is lined with glass panels that create a contemporary stained-glass effect.

PRESERVING & REINVENTING
Regional leaders re-envisioned the historic eight-story building at the intersection of Beale and Folsom streets as a contemporary and environmentally friendly facility that reflects the missions of the Bay Area agencies who call it home, and that will become an asset to a neighborhood that is also undergoing transformation. Investing in this existing structure rather than new development represents a prime example of adaptive reuse — something the regional agencies have been championing for years.

New Ways to Work
Isolating workers in enclosed individual offices is old school; new concepts of work environments call for more open and flexible floor plans that foster communication and collaboration.

New Entrance, New Address
The plan for transforming the building formerly known as 390 Main Street into the regional agency headquarters called for relocating the front entrance to the opposite side of the building to take advantage of streetscape improvements and create a more inviting and accessible entryway. The new address — 375 Beale Street — pays tribute to Senate Bill 375, landmark 2008 state legislation that charted a path toward sustainability and dramatically reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Second Life for Historic Wood
In a nod to the neighborhood’s past, the Bay Area Metro Center makes ample use of wood from 40-foot-long Douglas fir logs that served as pilings for the old Transbay Terminal, which was demolished to make way for a modern new facility. Full of character from 70 years of sitting below the water line, this salvaged wood has been incorporated into the first floor lobby security desk and the board room dais and wall paneling, as well as the coffee bars and lobby paneling on the partner agencies’ office floors.

Common Agendas
The upper floors of the building house the partner agencies’ staff, who are intermingled rather than grouped by agency. As another way of breaking down barriers, the design emphasizes informal gathering spaces conducive to casual interactions on the partner agencies’ common agendas.

Thinking Outside the Box
Two features help to break up the building’s boxy exterior and enliven the work space: a top-floor terrace overlooking the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge that has become a favorite lunch spot for staff, and a three-story cut-out for a Ginkgo tree.
SERVING THE REGION
The Bay Area Metro Center is the new home for some 600 staff members of the four partner regional agencies, but it’s also much more. It is intended as a public forum where issues can be aired and solutions discussed, a neighborhood and regional resource, and a place where the public can connect with the agencies and access their services.

Gathering Spaces
Branching off the first-floor lobby—itself an inviting public space—are a pair of spacious multi-purpose rooms available to the partner agencies for meetings and events. Across the lobby is a formal, auditorium-style board room that is shared by the partner agencies.

Window on the World of Traffic Operations
At the first-floor Regional Operations Center—or the ROC—operators will monitor MTC’s growing network of Express Lanes via a real-time traffic map and live video feeds visible to the public through a large window. During a regional emergency, the ROC will function as a command center where MTC staff can manage and coordinate transportation assets with regional partners.

Bay Area FasTrak® Lives Here
Customer service, account management and payment processing for the Bay Area FasTrak® electronic toll collection system operate from the second floor of the Bay Area Metro Center. FasTrak® is managed by the Bay Area Toll Authority, an MTC affiliate.

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Library: Information for the Asking
The place to research transportation, demographics, planning topics, economic trends and much more is the new MTC-ABAG library, located on the 7th floor of the Bay Area Metro Center and available to visitors by appointment. With over 15,000 books, periodicals, reports—and four daily newspapers—the library is a goldmine of information. The catalog can be accessed remotely through the MTC website.

Coffee, Clipper®, Commute Help and More
Ada’s Café and The Hub will be co-located in a ground floor storefront at 375 Beale, providing the public with one-stop access to products and services offered by the regional agencies located at the Bay Area Metro Center, all in a cozy café that serves gourmet coffee drinks and fresh breakfast and lunch options. Visitors will be able to get a FasTrak® toll tag, load cash value and passes onto a Clipper® transit fare card, apply for an air quality permit, find the best Bay Area bus route or buy a boxed set of San Francisco Bay Trail maps, among many other options. Ada’s Café is a Palo Alto-based nonprofit dedicated to hiring and training people with disabilities.

Tracking Air Quality
The Bay Area Air Quality Management District’s new state-of-the-art lab will perform over 25,000 air quality analyses per year on samples collected from monitoring stations, manufacturing facilities, dry cleaners and the like across the nine Bay Area counties to determine compliance with air quality standards and regulations—also performing analyses for other air quality organizations. Information from the region’s air monitoring network is used to develop models and examine long-term air quality trends.

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A LIVELY, TRANSIT-RICH LOCATION

The excitement surrounding the new regional agency headquarters at 375 Beale Street in San Francisco is amplified by the vibe of Rincon Hill, a transit-rich neighborhood that is enjoying a comeback after several decades of decline and relative obscurity.

Rincon Hill on the Rise
In the 19th century, Rincon Hill was one of San Francisco’s most fashionable residential districts. But its popularity waned after a major road project carved up the neighborhood, and what poor planning didn’t destroy, the 1906 earthquake did. Eventually, industrial uses gained a foothold. Then, in the 1990s, planners began to re-envision this forgotten corner of the city as a pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use downtown neighborhood. Rincon Hill today epitomizes urban living, with several striking residential highrises — and even a dog park in the shadow of the Bay Bridge approach.

Transit Smorgasbord
Another plus for the Bay Area Metro Center’s location is its proximity to a smorgasbord of public transit options that make it easy for staff, policy board members and the public to access the facility from the far corners of the region. The site sits a half block away from the Transbay Temporary Terminal, which is served by six intercity bus systems, not to mention numerous San Francisco Muni lines. BART and Caltrain are within walking distance, as is the San Francisco Ferry Terminal.

Grand Central Station of the West
The Metro Center’s block borders the Transbay District, where work is progressing on the stunning new Transbay Transit Center, the future terminus for intercity buses, Caltrain and the state’s high-speed rail line. Highway access is also convenient, with the west approach to the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge just a few blocks away.
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The official council of governments for the San Francisco Bay Area, the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) works to strengthen cooperation and collaboration among the region’s nine counties and 101 cities and towns and to provide innovative and cost-effective solutions to their common problems.

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About the Cover: Bay Area Metro Center Exemplifies Repurpose and Reuse

This photo captures a side view of the zigzagging “communicating” stairway that is suspended in the upper reaches of the airy atrium, tying together the four top floors. Not only is the Bay Area Metro Center as a whole a prime example of adaptive reuse, since it involved the repurposing of a structure dating back to the 1940s, but also, the interior stairs’ wooden treads are made from Douglas fir bumpers salvaged during the demolition of the post office once housed in the building.

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