

How S.F.'s Mid-Mission district is transforming

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Photos: Michael Macor, The Chronicle



Construction is well underway at The Panoramic, a 160 unit micro-studio and micro-suite project, on the corner of 9th and Mission Streets.

Mid-Mission developments

BUILT

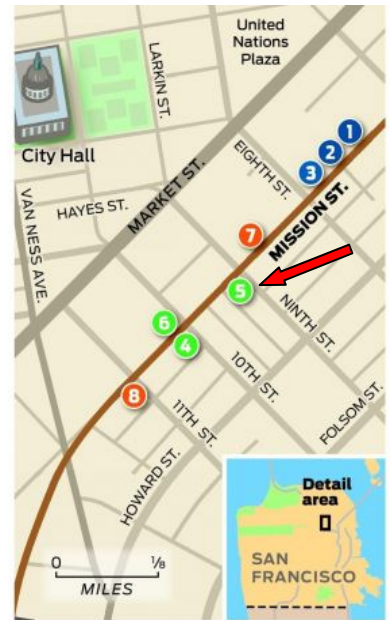
- 1 1160 Mission St.
260 condos
- 2 1188 Mission St.
440 units
- 3 1190 Mission St.
418 units

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

- 4 1415 Mission St.
126 rental apartments
- 5 1321 Mission St.
160 micro units for students and others
- 6 1400 Mission St.
190 affordable units

COMING SOON

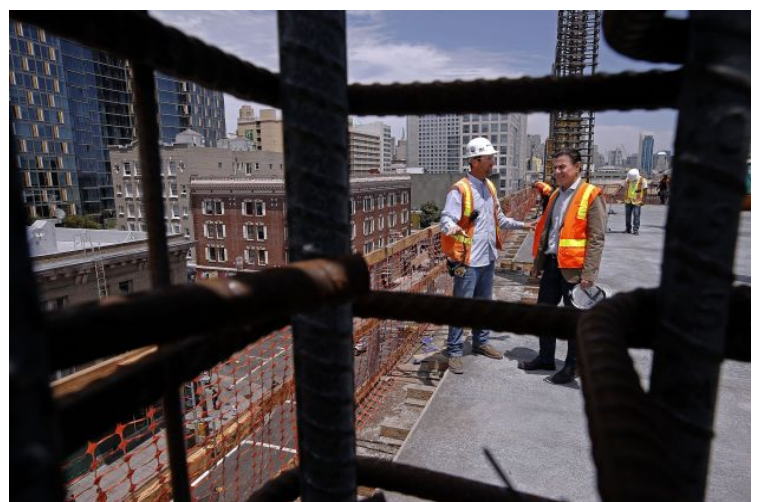
- 7 1270 Mission St.
200 rental units
- 8 1501 Mission St.
550 rental units



Todd Trumbull / The Chronicle



Construction worker Dan Brandon on the construction site of The Panoramic.



Project superintendent Chris Theisen talks with developer Patrick Kennedy on the freshly poured 6th floor.

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J.K. Dineen

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Mid-Mission is giving Mid-Market a run for its money.

While the tech-fueled renaissance of central Market Street has generated headlines around the world, a block away the parallel stretch of Mission Street is undergoing its own, much quieter transformation.

Over the past five years, 1,400 new housing units have opened on Mission Street between Fifth Street and South Van Ness Avenue, including 800 studio apartments that landlord Angelo Sangiacomo built between Seventh and Eighth streets.

And there are a lot more coming.

On Mission between Eighth Street and around 10th Street, contractors are pouring floors on three mid-rise residential towers, construction that will bring an additional 500 units to the corridor by the end of 2015.

At 1400 Mission St., Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corp. is building 190 affordable family units. Across the street, at 1415 Mission St., Martin Building Co. is working on 126 apartments, while a block to the east at 1321 Mission St., Berkeley developer Patrick Kennedy is well under way on 160 micro-studios and "micro-suites," half of which will provide housing for students from the California College of the Arts.

Plans for 750 more units

In the past two weeks alone, developers have submitted plans that would add an additional 750 units of housing to Mid-Mission. AGI Avant has proposed 200 units at 1270 Mission St., now home to a pizza place and parking lot. On the current site of Goodwill, there are plans for 550 apartments and a 460,000-square-foot city office building.

"We are hoping that part of Mission Street establishes its own identity, on a smaller scale than Market Street," Kennedy said. "Having a few thousand new residents should help generate fine-grain retail. ... There is nothing now on our block but pot clubs."

Those bullish on central Mission Street say it has the potential to be a more intimate alternative to Market Street. While Market has a few big housing projects in the pipeline, the street is dominated by block-long buildings home to big tech companies like Dolby, Twitter, Uber and Square.

In contrast, central Mission will be mostly residential. The street has split zoning: The north side is zoned for 140-foot mid-rise buildings and the south side for buildings 65 feet or less. Eric Tao of AGI Avant said the zoning will help protect the row of former garment sweatshops that line the south side of Mission.

Unique character

"Even as the high-rises get developed on the north side, the south side is always going to retain that unique Mission Street character with smaller, interesting buildings," Tao said.

Tao was an early believer in Mid-Mission. A decade ago the block of Mission between Seventh and Eighth streets was an abandoned Greyhound station and surface parking lots. There was a methadone clinic in the alley and homeless encampments.

"It was pretty God-awful," Tao said.

But when the federal government built its office building on the corner of Seventh Street - an attention-getting structure designed by well-known architect Thom Mayne of Los Angeles firm Morphosis - Tao saw potential. His group joined forces with TMG Partners to

build the 260-unit SoMa Grand condominium project.

"We made the probably foolish decision to roll everything we had into that site," he said. "In retrospect, we were a little early."

While that stretch of Mission Street still has its share of boarded-up storefronts, low costs have caught the attention of restaurateurs and their investors.

Places to eat, drink

In 2011, Matt Semmelhack opened AQ Restaurant & Bar at 1085 Mission St. and last year followed up with TBD at 1077 Mission St. The cocktail bar OddJob has opened at 1337 Mission St. Focaccia, part of the San Francisco group of downtown lunch spots, is opening at 1198 Mission St., according to Sangiacomo, the 89-year-old developer and landlord who has been trying to develop the neighborhood since the 1970s.

"They are spending a fortune," Sangiacomo said. "I wanted something really good in there, with sandwiches and salads. This is going to be the best one they've got."

Semmelhack said he was drawn to Mission Street because it offered a combination of low overhead and high potential. "Permits were pulled and there were cranes in the air, but the rent was still cheap," he said.

While AQ started as a destination restaurant, it's now drawing residents from buildings like Nema at 810th St. and Ava at 55 Ninth St. "There has been an obvious shift in terms of people being more local," Semmelhack said.

As Mission Street becomes denser, some question whether the city is paying enough attention to its public realm. The street is clogged with buses - the 14, 14L and SamTrans lines - with little space for cyclists. And the intersection of Mission and South Van Ness can be harrowing to cross on foot or bike.

Semmelhack recently joined the board of the Mid-Market Central Business District and has to remind other board members that Mission Street exists.

"Market Street is the No. 1 point of conversation in all the meetings, but I'm always outspoken about Mission Street," he said. "It's an important part of the Mid-Market district and at times it tends to get overlooked."

"Mission Street has been ignored forever," said John Elberling, executive director of Todco, which owns and manages about 1,000 units of affordable housing South of Market.

Gentrification concerns

His group owns residential hotels along Mission Street and is concerned about gentrification, particularly on the blocks on either side of Sixth Street, which has one of the city's biggest concentrations of residential hotels in San Francisco. He said the city needs to look at a Mid-Market development fee that would be invested back into neighborhood improvements.

Neil Hrushowy, general manager of the San Francisco Planning Department's City Design Group, which works to "balance all the functions of a street," agreed that Mission Street has played second fiddle to Market Street.

"After two rounds of community outreach," he said, "we heard strong feedback that we needed a more coherent plan for Mission Street."

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