



Navigation Centers: What do Neighbors Have to Fear?

A study on the neighborhood impacts of navigation centers for the San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing

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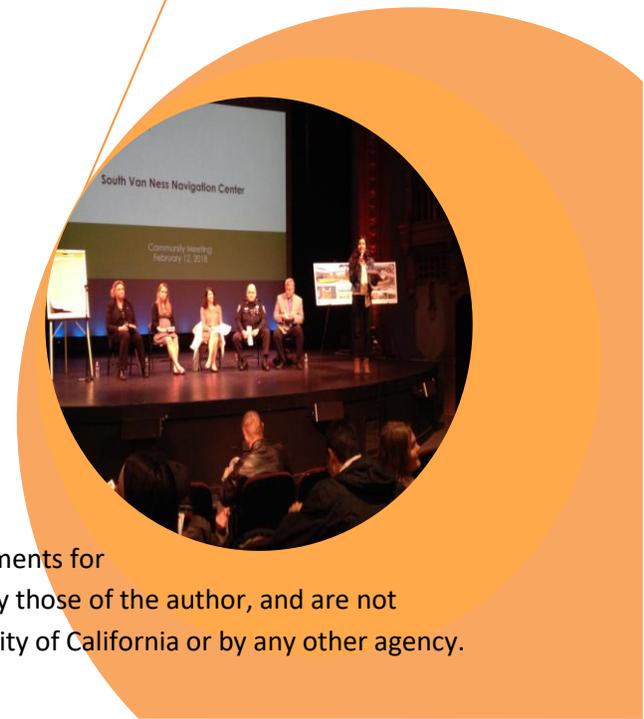


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Executive Summary

Neighborhood Opposition to Navigation Centers Impedes Homeless Services

The City and County of San Francisco is in the process of expanding its network of navigation centers, an updated version of a traditional homeless shelter. However, plans to open new centers are sometimes met with opposition from people who live or work nearby. Such opposition has blocked plans to open similar sites in San Francisco and impedes the city's ability to provide homeless services. People opposed to navigation centers and shelters expressed concern that they might have a negative impact on the surrounding neighborhood, such as by increasing crime, increasing visible homelessness, or decreasing property values. This report examines whether these impacts occur in practice.

Navigation Centers Have No Effect on Neighborhood Crime

An analysis of San Francisco Police Department data indicated that navigation centers have no effect on neighborhood crime. This analysis revealed that the number of crimes occurring near navigation centers was approximately equal to the number of crimes occurring at similar locations without centers.

A survey of people living and working near navigation centers also indicated that navigation center presence is unrelated to neighborhood crime. Over half of surveyed community members believed that neighborhood crime levels had stayed the same since a navigation center opened nearby, and felt just as safe in the area as they had previously.

Navigation Centers Likely to Decrease Visible Homelessness

About half of surveyed community members felt that visible homelessness decreased after a navigation center opened in their neighborhoods. A quarter believed that the amount of visible homelessness had stayed the same, and a quarter believed it had increased. However, results varied by location. Neighbors of the 1950 Mission navigation center were more likely to state that there was an increase in visible homelessness than people near other sites.

Navigation Centers Have No Effect on Property Values

Property values were rising in all neighborhoods, regardless of navigation center presence. The Mission saw an especially large increase in property values, despite being the only neighborhood hosting multiple navigation centers. Neighbors living within one block of the navigation centers did not believe that the centers had any effect on the value of their property.

Navigation Centers: A New Way to Address Homelessness

San Francisco's Homeless Crisis

According to the most recent count, there are approximately 7,500 homeless individuals in San Francisco on a given night. 4,300 of these individuals are unsheltered,¹ and 1,100 are unsheltered youth.² These numbers show that the level of homelessness in the city is unacceptably high, and that the systems

supporting them do not meet current levels of need. They also highlight the extreme importance of expanding the city's network of homeless services; every new shelter bed and supportive housing unit provides another opportunity to assist a member of an extremely vulnerable population.



Central Waterfront Navigation Center

Navigation Centers in San Francisco

One way that the city has been expanding homeless services is by opening navigation centers. A navigation center is a new type of homeless shelter which adopts a flexible approach to services, allowing the city to accommodate individuals who otherwise face barriers to coming indoors. By allowing residents to bring their partners, pets, and all of their possessions into the center, navigation centers eliminate the need to make large personal sacrifices in order to accept a shelter bed. They also allow residents to take meals, attend appointments, and participate in the many on-site services on their own schedule, making it easier to adjust to the large change in lifestyle necessitated by entering the program. Navigation centers have received positive reviews from homeless individuals,³ and 61% of past participants either entered permanent housing or were reunified with friends or family.⁴

¹ San Francisco 2017 Point in Time Homeless Count and Survey. Retrieved from <http://hsh.sfgov.org/research-reports/san-francisco-homeless-point-in-time-count-reports/>

² San Francisco 2017 Homeless Unique Youth Count and Survey. Retrieved from <http://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017-Youth-PIT-Final-Report-6.21.17.pdf>

³ Perspectives from the Navigation Center: Report #1. San Francisco Office of the Controller. Retrieved from <http://hsh.sfgov.org/research-reports/>

⁴ Navigation Center Data from the San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing. Retrieved 2018, May 3.

San Francisco Navigation Centers

Navigation Center	Beds	Dates of Operation	Provider
Open			
1950 Mission	75	3/2015 – Fall 2018	Episcopal Community Services
Civic Center Hotel	92	6/2016 – TBD	Community Housing Partnership
1515 South Van Ness	120	5/2017 – 6/2018	St. Vincent de Paul
Central Waterfront	64	7/2017 – 2020	Episcopal Community Services
Hummingbird	15	9/2017 – Indefinite	Positive Resource Center
Pipeline			
Division Circle	125	June 2018 – TBD	St. Vincent de Paul
5 th & Bryant	84	Summer 2018 – TBD	Episcopal Community Services
125 Bayshore	125	Summer 2018 – TBD	Provider Pending

There are five existing navigation centers in the city, for a total of 366 beds. Though 1950 Mission and 1515 South Van Ness are scheduled to close in 2018, they will be replaced by the three navigation centers in the pipeline. The city expects to have 505 navigation center beds in its network by late 2018.

Though navigation centers are the focus of this report, they only comprise a small component of the city's homeless services system, which also includes 1,186 adult shelter beds, 7,403 permanent supportive housing units, and many other services.⁵ The navigation centers' role in this system is to provide a place to stay while residents prepare to enter long-term housing, granted such housing is available.

Neighbors and Navigation Centers

Neighborhood Opposition Impedes Homeless Services

Despite the city's need for homeless services, San Francisco residents sometimes oppose plans to open navigation centers if they live, work, or own businesses nearby. In one example, over 200 Mission residents attended a community meeting about the then-upcoming navigation center at 1515 South Van Ness. Though many meeting attendees supported the project, there seemed to be just as many who did not wish to see it move forward.⁶

⁵ SF Dept. of Homelessness and Supportive Housing Five-Year Strategic Framework. Retrieved from <http://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/HSH-Strategic-Framework-Full.pdf>

⁶ Mission Neighbors Pack Town Hall Over Proposed Homeless Navigation Center. Retrieved from <https://hoodline.com/2017/04/mission-neighbors-pack-town-hall-over-proposed-homeless-navigation-center>

Though the navigation center at 1515 South Van Ness eventually opened, this has not been the case for all sites. A proposed shelter in Bayview was successfully blocked by neighborhood opposition⁷⁸, and plans to open a drop-in homeless service site in the Tenderloin were set aside for similar reasons.⁹ Fear of upsetting constituents is also the likely reason that most San Francisco supervisors do not support navigation center projects in the own districts, severely limiting the opportunities to open future sites. These setbacks work against the city's efforts to address its homelessness crisis.

Neighbors Fear Potential Impacts of Centers

Housed San Francisco residents are not unsympathetic to the difficulties faced by homeless individuals and families. Many consider homelessness to be a high-priority issue,¹⁰ and not a single person interviewed for this study was against providing homeless services. The main reason people opposed navigation centers was because they thought the centers would have a negative impact on the people living and working nearby. As one neighbor said, "I very much support giving people a helping hand. But I hope that the entrance [to the new navigation center] won't be on the same street as my business. It would be hard to sell the place."

I very much support giving people a helping hand. But I hope the entrance won't be on the same street as my business.

During public meetings, community members expressed specific concerns that:

- Navigation centers would increase nearby crime levels
- Navigation centers would increase visibility of homelessness in the surrounding neighborhood
- Navigation centers would depress nearby property values
- Their neighborhood was already providing more homeless services than other parts of the city

⁷ HSH Staff Member Interview, 2018, February 14.

⁸ S.F. Pulls Plug on Controversial Bayview Homeless Shelter. (2016, June 22). Retrieved from <https://www.kqed.org/news/10755030/s-f-pulls-plug-on-controversial-bayview-homeless-shelter>

⁹ SF pulls plug on costly SoMa lease for homeless department offices. (2017, September 12). Retrieved from <http://www.sfxaminer.com/sf-pulls-plug-costly-soma-lease-homeless-department-offices/>

¹⁰ 2018 Dignity Health CityBeat Poll. (2018, February 2). Retrieved from <https://sfchamber.com/blog/public-safety-homelessness-affordability-biggest-issues-2018-sf-chamber-poll/>

The uneven distribution of homeless shelters and navigation centers across the city is well substantiated and part of an on-going conversation in San Francisco's politics. However, there is no previous study examining the neighborhood impacts of San Francisco's navigation centers. This means that neighborhood opposition to navigation centers, and subsequent blockage of homeless services, may be occurring due to fear of impacts which do not occur in practice.

Placement of SF Homeless Services

Neighbors are correct when they state that homeless shelters and navigation centers are unevenly distributed across the city.



Opposition Groups May Represent a Vocal Minority

Though neighborhood groups have had enough influence to block service sites in the past, their opinions may not be shared by the majority of San Francisco residents. According to a recent poll, 90% of San Franciscans support navigation centers, and 77% would support one in their neighborhoods.¹¹ While this statistic likely varies by neighborhood, it indicates that homeless services may only be opposed by a few community members who have managed to make themselves heard.

The Neighborhood Impacts of Navigation Centers

Navigation Centers and Crime

The potential for increased crime was a common topic during public meetings about upcoming navigation centers. "What if someone tries to attack me?" asked one housed SOMA resident. "Even if I call the police, the response won't be fast enough to stop me from getting hurt." At another meeting, community members had similar concerns. "My business has been broken into before. I don't mean to cast blame, but I have cameras, and sometimes the people

¹¹ 2017 Dignity Health CityBeat Poll. (2017, March 1). Retrieved from <https://sfchamber.com/blog/navigation-centers-sanctuary-city-greater-housing-density-gain-broad-support-2017-poll/>

breaking in are homeless,” another resident stated. “My workers already don’t feel safe.”

The two analyses below explore the relationship between navigation centers and neighborhood crime. The first analysis uses city data and the second draws on neighbors’ perspectives.

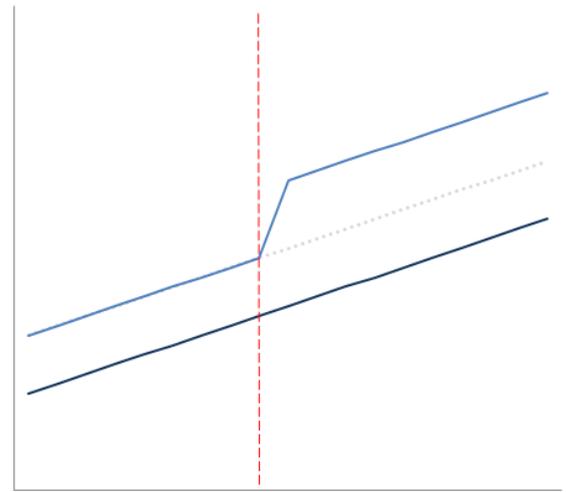
Analysis 1 Methodology: Examining Crime Levels Using SFPD Data

The first analysis explores the relationship between navigation centers and crime using data published by the San Francisco Police Department. This dataset shows the type and location of every known crime in the city. Incidents unrelated to street crime (e.g. embezzling) were removed from the analysis, as these crimes were irrelevant to the community’s concerns about navigation centers.

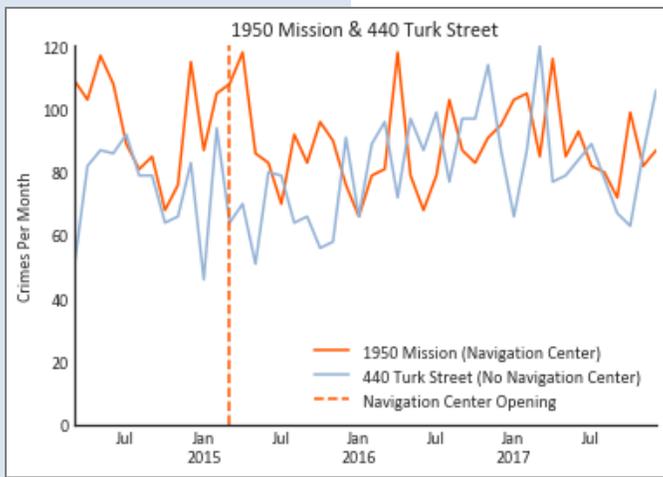
As there are many factors which affect crime rates, it would be misleading to simply conduct a before-after comparison of neighborhood crimes near navigation centers. This may falsely give the impression that navigation centers caused an increase (or decrease) in neighborhood crime, when crime levels were actually changing citywide. To provide a more meaningful assessment, this analysis uses a difference in differences research design to examine navigation centers’ impacts on crime. In a difference in differences analysis, researchers identify two similar sites which initially exhibited similar trends in the variable of interest (e.g. crime). If the variable at one site changes after a treatment is imposed (e.g. a navigation center opens), and no other changes occurred at that time, they conclude that the treatment caused the change.

Comparison sites (sites without navigation centers) were chosen carefully to ensure that they shared as many relevant characteristics with navigation center sites as possible. This is because the navigation center should be the primary

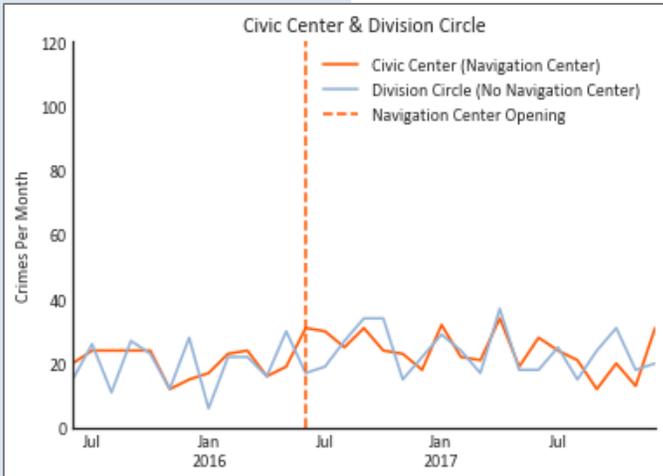
Example Difference in Differences Analysis



If the trends in two locations were initially similar, but diverge after a certain incident occurs, then researchers attribute the change to the incident.



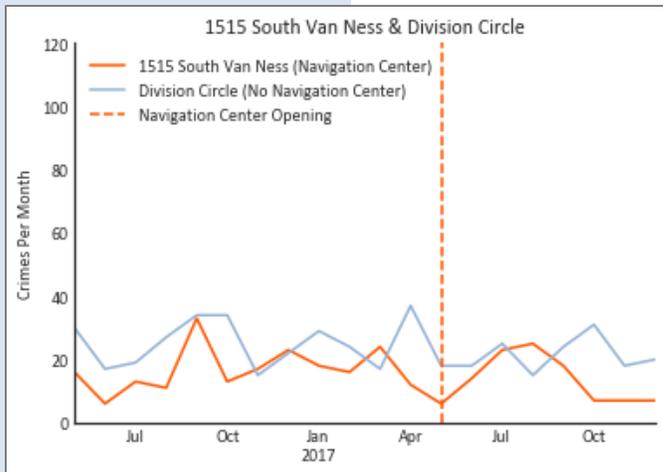
difference between the two sites; otherwise, changes in crime levels may be attributed to other differing characteristics. To ensure a high degree of similarity, candidates for comparison sites were limited to locations where the city has had past or present plans to build a new navigation center or homeless service site. Then, specific comparison sites were chosen based on similarity in crime trends one year prior to the navigation centers' open date.



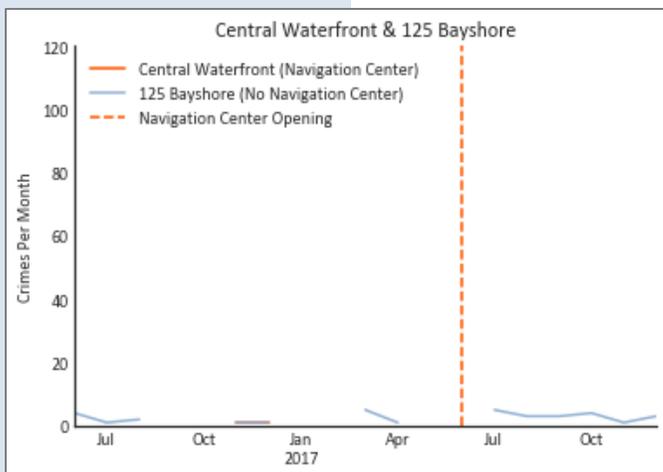
This analysis compared trends in the monthly crimes occurring within 500 feet of sites. 500 feet was chosen as the analysis radius because existing literature indicates that most potential effects occur within this distance.¹²¹³

Analysis 1 Results: No Link Established Between Navigation Centers and Crime

The number of crimes occurring each month within 500 feet of each navigation center site and non-navigation center site are shown on the left.



Regardless of the site, there is no change in crime trends following navigation center open dates. Crime levels around the Civic Center and South Van Ness navigation centers closely mirror trends at Division Circle (a future navigation center site), and crime levels around 1950 Mission hold steady even as they increase around 440 Turk Street (a future city office



¹² Santiago, A. M., Galster, G. C., & Pettit, K. L. (2003). Neighbourhood crime and scattered-site public housing. *Urban Studies*, 40(11), 2147-2163.

¹³ Galster, G., Pettit, K., Tatian, P., Santiago, A., & Newman, S. (2000). The impacts of supportive housing on neighborhoods and neighbors. *Washington, DC: The Urban Institute*.

building, which initially included plans for a drop-in homeless service center). Interestingly, there are no crimes at all around the Central Waterfront navigation center, even after the navigation center open date in June 2017. Overall, the results from this analysis indicate that navigation centers have no effect on neighborhood crime.

Analysis 2 Methodology: Interviewing & Surveying Community Members

The second analysis draws upon the perspectives of community members living and working near navigation centers. It complements the first analysis in three key ways. First, it provides information on neighborhood crimes which may not have been reported to SFPD, and therefore were not included in the previous analysis. Second, it gives insight into how navigation centers have personally affected members of the surrounding community. And third, it allows for a more nuanced understanding of neighborhood impacts than data is able to provide.

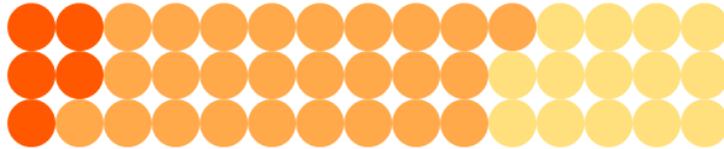
Community perspectives were gathered through interviews, surveys, and public comments. Interview and survey subjects were solicited by reaching out to community groups (e.g. neighborhood associations) and approaching businesses located near navigation centers. Public comments were noted at a community meeting regarding closure plans for the navigation center at 1515 South Van Ness. Survey-takers were only included if they were in the area both before and after the navigation centers opened, so they could speak to the relative changes in the area. Ultimately, over 50 community members’ perspectives were included in this analysis.

Analysis 2 Results: Neighbors Believe Crime Remained Unchanged

Of the community members who gave an opinion on crime, 60% felt that neighborhood crime levels had stayed the same since the navigation center opened. 29% believed that crime had increased, but a few in this group clarified that they didn’t believe that the navigation center caused the increase. 11% believed that crime had decreased. Car break-ins were the type of crime mentioned the most often, but community members

Neighbors say that since the navigation center opened...

neighborhood crime has **decreased** | stayed the same | increased



their feeling of safety and comfort in the neighborhood has **increased** | stayed the same | decreased



did not generally attribute this type of crime to the navigation centers. Two restaurant workers mentioned having their tips stolen by people they believed to be homeless, and one community member described an incident where he felt in danger of assault by a homeless individual.

I don't have any concerns. I don't really feel it.

Community members were also asked whether their feeling of safety and comfort in the neighborhood had changed since a navigation center opened. 57% of community members who responded to this question said that they felt equally safe in their neighborhoods after the navigation center opened. 23% said that their feeling of safety and comfort had increased, and 20% said that it had decreased. One community member said that she felt safer in her neighborhood due to a growing number of businesses and residents, rather than the navigation center.

Overall, most community members did not feel that the navigation centers had any impact on their personal lives. As one business owner commented, "I don't have any concerns [about the navigation center]. I don't really feel it."

Conclusion: Navigation Centers Have No Effect on Neighborhood Crime

By using two analytical approaches, this report is able to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between navigation centers and neighborhood crime. The first analysis shows that crime trends near navigation centers are similar to trends in comparable locations. The second analysis shows that most community members have not perceived any change in crime levels since the navigation centers opened. Together, both analyses indicate that despite fears to the contrary, navigation centers do not cause any increases in crime.

Navigation Centers and Visible Homelessness

Community members also worried that that navigation centers would draw larger numbers of the Bay Area's homeless to their neighborhoods. Though San Francisco residents are sympathetic to the difficulties experienced by the city's homeless, that sympathy is sometimes tempered by the discomfort of witnessing homelessness near their homes and workplaces. As one community member said, "It's very demoralizing to see people living in tents on the streets. I think it is possible to balance out helping the homeless and keeping the neighborhood safe and clean."

The city has been making continued efforts to achieve both of these goals. After learning from their experiences at the 1950 Mission and Civic Center navigation centers, they adjusted their strategies for subsequent sites. One adjustment was to pilot a new policy at 1515 South Van Ness. For this policy, the city identified an area around the navigation center for targeted homeless outreach. Homeless San Franciscans located within this area were given priority for navigation center access so that the surrounding community could benefit from hosting the center. While many community members approved of this idea, a few were hesitant. During a public meeting, one community member commented, “Wouldn’t that just encourage more people to move to that area, in hopes of getting invited to the navigation center?”

This report examines how navigation centers affect visible homelessness in surrounding neighborhoods. As city data relating to visible homelessness had limitations for the purposes of analysis, this section of the report relies solely on community member report.

Methodology: Interviewing and Surveying Community Members

Community members’ perspectives were collected using a combination of interviews, surveys, and community meetings, and were solicited using the same methods described in the previous section. Due to policy differences between navigation centers, results are expected to vary depending on the site.

Results: Neighbors Believe Visible Homelessness has Decreased

Analysis results were as follows: 49% of community members

felt that visible homelessness had decreased in their neighborhoods. 26% believed that it increased, and 25% said that it stayed the same. Some mentioned seeing new homeless individuals in their neighborhoods, but said that overall, there were fewer people staying on the street. “I see new faces, so I believe that there are more homeless in the area,” said one community member working across the street from a navigation center. “But they aren’t hanging around outside anymore. They are spending their time in the [navigation center].”

Neighbors say that since the navigation center opened, visible homelessness in the neighborhood has... decreased | stayed the same | increased



As expected, community members' feelings about the navigation centers varied by site. For example, 50% of community members near the navigation center at 1950 Mission reported an increase in visible homelessness, a clear departure from the general opinion. Community members in this area referred to a large group of people who regularly spent time directly in front of the navigation center. "It definitely wasn't like that before," said one community member, "I don't know if [the navigation center] caused it, but it definitely wasn't like that before."

On the other hand, the majority of community members near the newer navigation centers (1515 South Van Ness and Central Waterfront) said that there was a decrease in visible homelessness. This is especially promising, as it indicates that the city's navigation center policies are moving in the right direction. These results are particularly meaningful for 1515 South Van Ness due to their new homeless outreach strategy. A decrease in this location indicates that the policy had its intended effect of reducing nearby homelessness, despite concerns that it may encourage people to locate in the area.

Limitations: Sample May Not Represent the Entire Community

Relying solely on community member report has limitations which cannot be ignored. The greatest limitation relates to the types of community members who were included in the analysis. Members of neighborhood associations or other similar groups were more accessible than typical neighborhood residents, and were therefore more likely to be approached for their perspectives. However, people who have the time and inclination to be active in their communities are unlikely to hold the same views as the average neighborhood resident. Since this portion of the report is not supported by city data, it is especially important to be cognizant of its limitations.

Why No Quantitative Analysis of Visible Homelessness?

Quantitative analysis was considered for this section, but was not pursued due to the following data limitations:

- **911 Call Data** - 911 call data may have revealed patterns in visible homelessness, since SF residents sometimes call this number to report homeless-related concerns. However, the public version of this dataset does not include geographic coordinates, making it difficult to understand which calls took place near navigation centers.
- **311 Call Data** - 311 call data may similarly have been used to assess patterns in visible homelessness. However, as part of the city's community outreach strategy, they encourage neighbors near navigation centers to contact 311 with homelessness-related questions and concerns. This means that an increase in calls in these areas may have been caused by the outreach campaign rather than a change in visible homelessness.
- **Encampment Data** - Over the past several months, the city has been tracking the number of tents located near 1515 South Van Ness to assess the effectiveness of their new homeless outreach strategy. Since the city already monitors this data, it would be redundant to include it in this report. In addition, this dataset only includes encampments around 1515 South Van Ness – it is not possible to examine visible homelessness around other sites using this source.

Conclusion: Navigation Centers Likely Decrease Visible Homelessness

Despite its limitations, one can still draw useful conclusions from the above analysis. Though the opinions of surveyed community members may not be aligned with the opinions of the neighborhood as a whole, they do provide insight into how neighborhoods changed after the navigation centers opened. Using this survey, one can tentatively conclude that future navigation centers are likely to reduce visible homelessness nearby. However, this is an area which could benefit from further study.

Navigation Centers and Property Values

Some community members worried that property located near navigation centers would experience a decrease in value. As property is a large investment, a decrease in property values could have significant repercussions for a property owner. This analysis therefore assesses navigation centers' impacts on neighborhood property values.



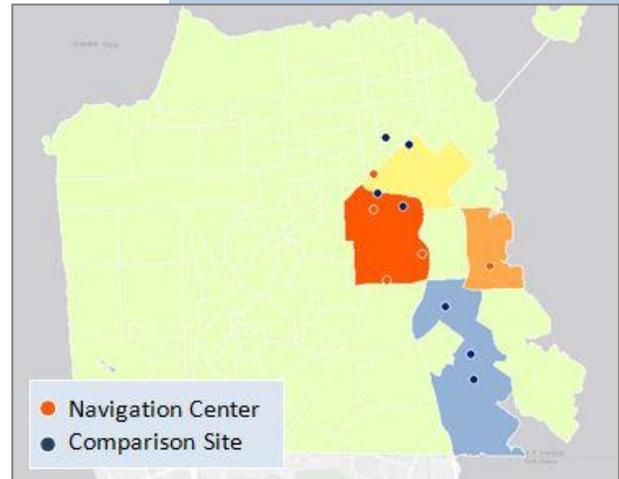
Civic Center Navigation Center

Methodology: Using Zillow Home Value Data to Examine Property Values

Navigation centers' impacts on property values were examined using the Zillow Home Value Index, a seasonally-adjusted estimate of median home values within a neighborhood over time. The Zillow Home Value Index was graphed for every neighborhood containing a navigation center (the Mission, Central Waterfront & Dogpatch, and SOMA) from January 2014 to February 2018, as this was the most recent data available. The boundaries for each neighborhood, as defined by Zillow, can be seen on the map on the next page.

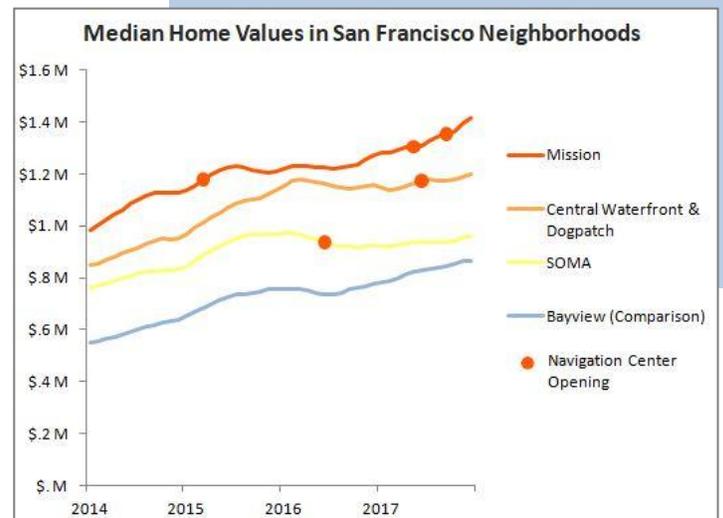
The Zillow Home Value Index was also graphed for Bayview, which serves as a comparison neighborhood for the analysis. Bayview was chosen as the comparison neighborhood because despite containing multiple locations which were considered for navigation centers, it does not yet host a site.

Trends in Bayview's median property values provide an understanding of how property values in other neighborhoods might have changed if not for the navigation centers. Though the Tenderloin also includes a site which was considered for homeless services, it was excluded due to a lack of available data.



Results: Navigation Centers Do Not Affect Neighborhood Property Values

As shown in the graph, median property values are increasing in all neighborhoods regardless of navigation center presence. Property values in the Mission increased at a greater rate than each of the other neighborhoods despite containing the most navigation centers. This is a strong indication that property values were not negatively impacted by navigation center presence.



On the other end of the spectrum, SOMA's property values increased at the slowest rate. As growth slowed soon after the navigation center opened in June 2016, the navigation center may have played a role in the change. However, since SOMA's only navigation center is located on the edge of the neighborhood boundary, it is also possible that the change was due to other factors.

Median property value trends in Central Waterfront & Dogpatch provide information which is especially relevant to recent conversations about San Francisco homeless services. This is because, unlike the other neighborhoods in the analysis, Central Waterfront & Dogpatch does not contain any other homeless shelters. Due to this, Central Waterfront & Dogpatch's experience can

provide understanding of how navigation centers may affect property values in other service-poor areas, such as the western and southern parts of San Francisco.

As is shown in the graph, property values in Central Waterfront & Dogpatch closely resembled trends in the comparison neighborhood both before and after the navigation center opened. This means that the navigation center did not have adverse effects on property values in the area, and are less likely to have adverse effects in similar sites. However, it is possible that the lack of impact is due to the navigation center's placement in an industrial area; there are no homes or businesses within close proximity of the center. A navigation center may have a different impact in a service-poor area with many homes or businesses nearby.

Limitations: Neighborhood Boundaries Do Not Allow for Specificity

Due to a lack of available data, the property values analysis was conducted on a neighborhood level. Unlike the crimes analysis, which isolated information within 500 feet of navigation centers, this analysis can only provide information on the neighborhood as a whole. While neighborhoods did not experience a decrease in property values, it is possible that properties within 1-2 blocks of navigation centers were affected differently. It will take further study to determine whether such properties experience decreases in value.

Conclusion: Navigation Centers Do Not Appear to Reduce Property Values

Despite its limitations, this analysis strongly suggests that San Francisco property owners do not experience negative financial repercussions due to navigation centers. Much of the past opposition to navigation centers has come from neighbors living several blocks away from the centers, and these neighbors can feel confident that their property values will not be affected.

Property owners within close proximity to the navigation centers can feel reassured as well. Seven of the community members interviewed for this report owned property within a block of a navigation center and were willing to speak to its value. Of these seven people, five believed that their property values had stayed the same since the navigation center opened (the others indicated an increase and a decrease, respectively). None of the five felt that the navigation centers had an impact on their property values. Though this is a small number of people and not enough to be considered a full analysis, this provides some indication of how navigation centers may affect the value of nearby property.

Other Potential Impacts and Areas of Interest

Though this report primarily focuses on crime, visible homelessness, and property values, there are other ways that navigation centers might affect their surrounding neighborhoods. This section provides a brief overview of the other potential impacts mentioned by community members either during public comment or interviews.



Division Circle Navigation Center (under construction)

Navigation Centers are Unlikely to Affect Businesses

27 of the community members who were interviewed or surveyed for this report felt that they were able to speak to the navigation centers' impacts on businesses. Of these community members, 52% said that the navigation center had no effect, 26% said it had a negative effect, and 22% said it had a positive effect on their businesses or places or work. Overall, this seems to indicate that navigation centers do not have a strong impact on businesses.

However, community members' opinions on this topic varied greatly by site. Several community members working near the 1950 Mission navigation center strongly felt that the navigation center had a negative impact on business. Two people specifically mentioned vacant storefronts at properties on the same block as the navigation center. According to them, the people who owned those buildings were reluctant to open businesses due to activities occurring nearby, and a third business had to close for similar reasons. It is unclear whether these decisions were made because of the navigation center itself, or due to people unaffiliated with the navigation center who often spend time in that area.

Navigation Centers May Affect Neighborhood Cleanliness

Most community members did not speak about the navigation center's impacts on neighborhood cleanliness during interviews, indicating that this is not an issue on most neighbors' minds. However, a few brought it up independently. Most of these community members felt that they saw more human waste on sidewalks and streets than they had prior to the opening of the navigation center. "Back when there was an encampment, people respected the boundaries of the encampment and did their business there," said one community member, "Now,

I regularly see feces or urine in the street next to my business.” One community member believed the area looked cleaner than it had previously. “[My district’s supervisor] wants the navigation centers to succeed, so she’s going to make sure the area is kept clean,” she explained.

The city has recently begun partnering with a nonprofit organization to address neighborhood cleanliness near navigation centers. This nonprofit provides job training and stipends for homeless individuals who clean up litter on San Francisco’s streets. Though this partnership is still new, it is possible that navigation centers will have a positive impact on neighborhood cleanliness in the near future.

Neighbors Would Like More Community Engagement

Many neighbors held firm opinions about the city’s community engagement process prior to opening navigation centers. People living near the Central Waterfront navigation center were generally satisfied with the amount of notice and attention they received from the city on this issue. However, community members near other sites did not feel the same way. Many of these community members wished the city had given more advance notice, sought more community input, and provided more information about navigation centers.

While most community members were uncertain as to how many months in advance they would have wanted to receive notice of navigation center plans, they were very clear that they wanted more. One resident described many community members’ thoughts on the subject. “I think the city should have let us know once the initial thought occurred and sought our input,” he said. “I would like to think that the city would place value on our insight.” Another community member simply said, “People just want to be heard.”

Many community members felt that additional education on navigation centers would have resolved some of the neighborhoods’ concerns. “I think that if people had a better idea of what the navigation centers were and the types of services they provided, there would not have been as much push-back,” said a resident living near the 1515 South Van Ness navigation center. “As it was, it felt like the city was just forcing this thing on us and not telling us what it entailed.” A director at one of the navigation center’s nonprofit providers agreed with this assessment. “I encourage people to come to the navigation center and see what

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we do,” she said. “Most people who visit feel more comfortable with the centers afterwards.”¹⁴

Closing

This study provides evidence that navigation centers do not have negative impacts on the neighborhoods where they are located. In some cases, housed residents may even benefit from having a homeless service site nearby. This shows that the city does not need to compromise the well-being of housed residents in order to provide support for their homeless neighbors. It is my hope that information from this report will enrich dialogue with community members and policymakers interested in the neighborhood impacts of homeless service sites, and ultimately contribute to San Francisco’s efforts to reduce homelessness.

¹⁴ Nonprofit Director Interview. March 5, 2018.

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