

# City of South San Francisco, CA

## City Council Retreat

Held February 8, 2025

The City of South San Francisco, CA, held a City Council Retreat on February 8, 2025. The retreat was planned and facilitated by Raftelis.

## Opening and Welcome

After the City Clerk administered the public comment period, Mayor Eddie Flores opened the retreat by thanking the Council and staff for their time and dedication (a complete list of City attendees is included in Appendix A). He encouraged the group to lead with boldness and intentionality, to pursue a vision that transcends what the City has done before, and to embrace the work ahead with joy, leaving a lasting legacy of a vibrant South San Francisco. Council members were asked to share their expectations and hopes for the workshop and some responses, summarized at right, echoed the Mayor's welcome.

| Expectations and Hopes for the Council Retreat                 |
|--|
| Come away with a roadmap of priorities                         |
| Collaborate  |
| Look to the future   |
| Focus on the needs of the City                                 |
| Celebrate and build on accomplishments                         |
| Productive, rich conversations                                 |
| Appreciation of lasting impact after each Councilmember's term |

## Council's Legacy

Council members were asked to think about what they hoped would be said about them after their term(s) on the City Council has concluded. In response, a strong theme emerged that Council members wanted to consider legacy in the collective, regarding what all of Council and staff can achieve together for the City and emphasizing a philosophy of "**We, not I.**" Additional responses are captured below:

- Doing the right thing
- Compassionate, informed decisions
- Making our City the best for everyone
- Being a welcoming, inclusive City
- Setting a strong foundation to build on
- Working collectively for the City
- Functional Council and effective governance
- Diverse City, Council, and elected representatives

## Updates and Sharing with Department Heads

To help set the context for identifying priorities, Council members rotated through table discussions with department heads on topics of interest, including current challenges, opportunities, and key initiatives. Departments were grouped together in five tables, including:

- Internal Services: **Finance, Human Resources, Information Technology**
- Public Safety: **Fire, Police**
- Community Programs: **Economic and Community Development, Library**
- Public Infrastructure: **Parks and Recreation, Public Works**
- City Leadership: **City Manager, City Attorney, City Clerk**



When asked about takeaways from the discussions, Council members highlighted the importance of using staff knowledge and expertise to inform their decisions. Council members also referred several times to balance: in budget development, between taking actions and understanding the community impacts, and for staff workloads. The complete responses are below:

- Time management
  - Ensuring requests made to staff are strategic
  - Making decisions that are informed by City resource levels
- Wondering what the ideal budget would be to take care of all City needs
  - Using information and tools to inform decisions
  - A budget aligned with priorities and informed by updated Master Plans
- Balance of moving policy forward and making a present impact on the growing community
- Valuing of work-life balance for employees
- Gratitude for and pride in City staff and services
- Recognized the alignment of values between Council and staff



## Interview Themes: Accomplishments

Building on the discussions with department heads, the facilitator provided additional context by reviewing accomplishments that Council members had highlighted during interviews prior to the retreat. When asked for any additions to the accomplishments listed below, the Council highlighted that the City was recognized for completing its state Housing Element not only successfully but also on time.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Effective City Operations</b>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Passed Measure W</li> <li>- Revamped website, went live</li> <li>- South City Shuttle upgrades</li> <li>- Kicking off the Property Business Improvement District process</li> </ul>   | <b>Inclusive Community</b>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expanded Pride Celebration</li> <li>- Completed Racial and Social Equity Plan goals</li> <li>- Established Age-Friendly Task Force</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Expanding Community Spaces</b>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New Parks/Recreation/Library Facility</li> <li>- Centennial Way Park South opened</li> <li>- Oyster Point Park opened</li> <li>- Linden Park community engagement started</li> </ul> | <b>Essential Resources</b>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Established Anti-Displacement Advisory Committee</li> <li>- Passed Wage Theft Ordinance</li> <li>- Safeway site construction underway</li> </ul> |

## True Today, True in 10 Years

To begin the discussion about vision and future focus, the City Council was asked to respond to two questions:

- What is true about South San Francisco today that you hope will still be true 10 years from now?
- What do you hope WILL be true 10 years from now that is not currently true?

Council members could provide up to three responses to each question, which are listed in the table below.

| True Today – <i>Still true in 10 Years</i>   | Not <u>Yet</u> True – <i>Hope WILL be true in 10 years</i>  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to celebrate our diverse communities</li> <li>• Inclusive, diverse, believing in the greater good of the community</li> <li>• Diverse, inclusive, and equitable community</li> <li>• South City continues to be a tight knit community</li> <li>• The need for housing</li> <li>• Fiscally responsible</li> <li>• A functional city government, not dysfunctional</li> <li>• A city that is envied by other communities in the Bay Area</li> <li>• A safe city</li> <li>• Emergency prepared</li> <li>• Building affordable childcare space</li> <li>• A successful and vibrant business community</li> <li>• Continue to lead in economic development and innovation</li> <li>• Need for public transportation</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing will be affordable</li> <li>• Best quality of life for everyone</li> <li>• A city where we continue to have all materials in various languages</li> <li>• That we increase population of Black community living in SSF</li> <li>• Having the best schools/best place to raise a family in the county</li> <li>• Robust public/active transit infrastructure so people don't need a car to get around</li> <li>• Updated infrastructure to support growing population</li> <li>• Traffic/congestion reduction</li> <li>• The city will be made whole regarding its elected representatives, legislators, and supervisor</li> <li>• The city's financial condition will be truly enhanced by its business community</li> <li>• Income &gt; expenses, bigger reserve</li> <li>• That the economic separation of the haves and have nots is dissolved</li> </ul> |

The following themes emerged from the activity:

- True Today – what to sustain
  - Focus on quality services
  - An inclusive community
  - Organizational effectiveness
  - A safe City
  - Vibrant economic development
- Not Yet True – what to make true
  - High quality of life for all
  - Infrastructure supports transportation needs
  - Strengthened relationship with regional elected representatives
  - Enhanced fiscal stability
  - Economic development benefits all

Council members were asked to share their reactions to seeing each other's responses and the themes that emerged. Councilmember Buenaflor Nicolas noted the alignment of many responses, and Councilmember James Coleman also shared that he didn't see much disagreement between the responses. Similarly, Mayor Flores mentioned that inclusivity was commonly valued or noted but that there was also diverse thinking from each Council member. Councilmember Mark Nagales highlighted the points of fiscal responsibility and continue to deliver quality services. Mayor Flores had also shared that the fiscal aspect resonated with him, and Councilmember Mark Addiego noted that there was a lot of hope reflected among all the responses.

## Council Goals and Priorities

The group began the goal and priority-setting portion of the day with an added public comment period. The facilitator provided additional context by reviewing the "Big Rocks" approach from the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey, including the key points to 1) Put the big rocks in first, 2) Don't fill up the jar with so many small rocks that there isn't room for the big ones, and 3) Then keep space for the unplanned, emergencies, or new requirements.

The facilitator led the group in a review of topics raised by Council members during interviews prior to the retreat. In reaction to the topics, which are listed in full below, the Mayor highlighted the importance of childcare.

- Westborough Center Expansion
- Housing (affordable; "missing middle")
- Priority-based budgeting
- Senior and women's services
- Downtown business improvement district
- Traffic flow
- Equity plan
- Park development (Linden)
- Community events
- Local hiring preference
- Maximizing City resources
- Vacant properties (i.e., MSB)
- Removing barriers for reach codes (e.g., EV charging stations)

The group next viewed a list of ongoing initiatives and prior Council priorities, which came from the prior year's 2024 City Council Priorities as presented in a City Council meeting on January 22, 2025. In preparation for the retreat, the facilitator collated these ongoing initiatives with the topics raised in Council interviews and drafted a preliminary framework with proposed groupings of the Council-identified priorities.

The draft preliminary framework was provided as a handout (with the below flow of categories) to allow for the Council's review, discussion, and changes. Many of the items identified by Council were specific **Activities and Initiatives**, which compose the most detailed level of the framework. These details were grouped by proposed **Major Focus Areas** that reflected the common themes, and **Key Strategies** were suggested to summarize potential policy direction by the Council that would tie to their identified Activities and Initiatives.





The facilitator shared the proposed **Focus Areas** for the group's discussion and asked the Council to voice their reactions and any changes they would make. The Mayor said he thought the buckets were a great framing of the City's "why." Council members identified childcare, resilient infrastructure, and space/capacity for unplanned emergencies as additional areas they would like to see incorporated.

The group then reviewed the proposed **Strategies**, and the Council discussed each focus area. The Council's discussions to revise the Strategies are captured in Table 1 below, and the updated Strategies are reflected in Table 2 in the subsequent section.

**Table 1: Council Discussion of Initial Focus Areas and Strategies**

| Major Focus Areas and Key Strategies   | Discussion Notes  |
|--|---|
| <b>Housing and Supportive Services</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advance affordable housing development</li> <li>• Encourage housing for the Missing Middle</li> <li>• Implement Anti-Displacement Policies</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add creative financing to the Housing area</li> <li>• Some actions have more detail to them or might even reflect non-City actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Foxridge Parcels refers to workforce housing, which would involve partnering with the community</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Desire to attract development and generate revenue</li> <li>• Want to encourage a balanced housing supply, including renters and owners, and the workforce</li> <li>• The City should be a conduit for information, tools, and resources</li> <li>• Right to Legal Counsel (activity) is broader than Housing alone</li> <li>• A strategy or activity should be "Partnership with providers to support people who are unhoused" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Partnerships with regional bodies, community organizations</li> </ul> </li> </ul>  |
| <b>Quality of Life</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catalyze a thriving downtown</li> <li>• Support local workers and business owners</li> <li>• Deliver services and amenities that address community needs</li> <li>• Promote community safety and preparedness</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hesitance to limit focus to downtown or any one area within the City, especially when there are other struggling retail areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Should the strategy refer to downtown, retail generally, maybe small businesses?</li> <li>◦ Want to allocate resources equally, but also like the efficiency of testing a pilot program, then applying learnings elsewhere</li> <li>◦ Downtown has many business owners, while other areas (i.e., Brentwood, Sunshine) might have a single property owner who is a landlord to multiple businesses</li> <li>◦ Group decided to leave the strategy for downtown but add a strategy for a "thriving retail environment"</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Cleanliness in the City is a factor both for businesses and Quality of Life broadly</li> <li>• Many resident communications to Council about people who are unhoused, which ties to Housing</li> <li>• Cold weather can add to calls for service to fires at encampments</li> <li>• Ensure Quality of Life includes mental health and explore making the integrated Mental Health Clinician a permanent employee</li> <li>• Resident complaints to the Council about RVs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Support residents who live in RVs</li> <li>◦ Address community concerns about long-term RV parking/presence</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| <b>Modern and Sustainable Organization</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure financial sustainability</li> <li>• Conduct long-</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on creating revenue, realize opportunities, and be innovative and creative</li> <li>• Look at initiatives Council had been hesitant about before</li> <li>• Potentially check appetite for a ballot measure for new revenue, but some concern against regressive measures</li> <li>• Revise "Maximize City resources" to "Optimize City resources"</li> </ul>  |

| Major Focus Areas and Key Strategies  | Discussion Notes   |
|---|--|
| range planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maximize City resources</li> <li>Communicate effectively with residents</li> </ul>  |  |
| <b>Welcoming and Connected Community</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase access to childcare</li> <li>Foster an Age-Friendly Community</li> <li>Enact policies that support public health</li> <li>Empower underserved communities</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good example of a positive event was the Lunar New Year Night Market held by the City the evening before the retreat, which was a great opportunity to highlight small businesses</li> <li>City's calendar of events reflects its diverse community</li> <li>Additional events reflect the changing community and community requests</li> <li>Missing aspect of City events is community partner(s) to help organize and hold the events</li> <li>Peer cities sometimes have commissions that plan events, though serving on a commission is a volunteer service itself</li> <li>Hope to establish Senior's Commission to uplift and hear more from that community</li> <li>Want others inspired by South San Francisco to say, "we should do that for our city"</li> <li>Some community initiatives were raised by Communications staff during department sharing</li> </ul> |
| <b>Infrastructure and the Environment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Champion environmental protection</li> <li>Make sustainable options easier</li> <li>Improve traffic flow</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attention needed for 'invisible infrastructure'</li> <li>Add a priority for the aging infrastructure underground</li> <li>Regional utilities impact this topic but also impact Housing and Quality of Life</li> <li>A peer jurisdiction found a way around limits to support sustainability by regulating building efficiency for electrification</li> </ul>  |

## Priority-Setting

The discussion of Major Focus Areas and Key Strategies informed a revised framework for the Council to vote on. Each Council member received six star stickers with different colors from each other, and they could assign one per Strategy, identifying their top priorities for the next year. The voting activity is shown at right. Council members and the facilitator all emphasized that strategies not receiving stickers remain important for the City.



Table 2: Council Votes on the Revised Strategies

| Major Focus Areas                   | Key Strategies  | Sticker Colors                    | Votes                                       | Count |
|-------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|---|-------|
| Housing and Supportive Services     | Advance affordable housing development                              |                                   |   |       |
|                                     | Pursue creative financing strategies                                | Gold<br>Green<br>Silver<br>Orange | Addiego,<br>Coleman,<br>Nagales,<br>Nicolas | 4     |
|                                     | Encourage balanced housing supply (including rent & own, workforce) | Gold<br>Green<br>Blue             | Addiego,<br>Coleman,<br>Flores              | 3     |
|                                     | Be a conduit for public information and access to tools             |                                   |   |       |
|                                     | Implement Anti-Displacement policies                                | Green                             | Coleman                                     | 1     |
| Quality of Life                     | Catalyze a thriving downtown  | Blue                              | Flores                                      | 1     |
|                                     | Support a sustainable retail environment                            | Gold<br>Green<br>Silver           | Addiego,<br>Nagales,<br>Coleman             | 3     |
|                                     | Deliver services and amenities that address community needs         |                                   |   |       |
|                                     | Promote community safety and preparedness                           | Silver<br>Orange                  | Nagales,<br>Nicolas                         | 2     |
|                                     | Implement a cohesive strategy for a clean South San Francisco       | Blue                              | Flores                                      | 1     |
| Modern and Sustainable Organization | Ensure financial sustainability (including revenue generation)      | Gold<br>Green<br>Blue<br>Silver   | Addiego,<br>Coleman,<br>Flores,<br>Nagales  | 4     |
|                                     | Conduct long-range planning   |                                   |   |       |
|                                     | Optimize City resources   | Gold<br>Orange                    | Addiego,<br>Nicolas                         | 2     |
|                                     | Communicate effectively with residents                              | Orange                            | Nicolas                                     | 1     |
| Welcoming and Connected Community   | Increase access to childcare  | Silver                            | Nagales                                     | 1     |
|                                     | Foster an Age-Friendly Community                                    | Blue                              | Flores                                      | 1     |
|                                     | Enact policies that support public health                           |                                   |   |       |
|                                     | Empower underserved communities                                     |                                   |   |       |
|                                     | Engage community volunteers (events, Commissions, partners)         | Gold<br>Green<br>Blue<br>Orange   | Addiego,<br>Coleman,<br>Flores,<br>Nicolas  | 4     |
| Infrastructure and the Environment  | Champion environmental protections                                  |                                   |   |       |
|                                     | Make sustainable options easier                                     |                                   |   |       |



| Major Focus Areas | Key Strategies                                | Sticker Colors | Votes   | Count |
|-------------------|---|----------------|---------|-------|
|                   | Improve traffic flow                          | Silver         | Nagales | 1     |
|                   | Plan for aging infrastructure (underground)   | Orange         | Nicolas | 1     |
|                   | Invest in Resilient and Sustainable solutions |                |         |       |

Strategies across all five Focus Areas received votes from Council members. Five strategies received a majority of Council votes, meaning three or more votes, including:

- Pursue creative financing strategies for housing (4)
- Encourage balanced housing supply, including rent & own, workforce (3)
- Support a sustainable retail environment (3)
- Ensure financial sustainability, pursue creative revenue generation (4)
- Engage community volunteers for events through commissions and partners (4)

## Council Input on the Events Calendar

During retreat preparations, the City identified a few additional items for discussion outside the priority-setting workshop program. One item, the Events Calendar, was discussed during a working lunch. The following summarizes the discussion:

- The City Manager, Sharon Ranals, discussed the practice of organizing one signature event per year of the mayor's choosing. One signature event was budgeted/planned for, but the City Manager had heard energy around more events and/or continuing past signature events.
- The Council discussed a desire to continue events like the Women's Conference, though perhaps bi-annually, and to continue the expanded Pride Event, but they acknowledged limits to staff bandwidth and budget.
- It was suggested that a follow-up action might be identifying ways to partner for or hand off events.
- Some of the Council and/or staff noted that they could also highlight events outside of South San Francisco, from the County or other neighboring Cities.

## Staying on Track with Priorities

Achieving desired results on the council's top priorities requires focus and discipline. The facilitator shared best practices for maintaining priorities and criteria for when Council might consider adding additional priorities during the year. The first steps are for staff to incorporate the identified priorities into the budget and department work plans and then to provide regular progress reports. The Council can support successful implementation by minimizing new requests that would take staff away from the identified priorities or by determining what priorities might drop off or be delayed if something new is added.

If the Council encounters new projects during the year, the best practice criteria for evaluating them include:

- **Emergency** (natural disaster, pandemic, civil unrest)
- New **outside funding opportunity** that is time-sensitive
- New **multi-agency opportunity** that cannot be delayed
- **Community safety** issue that must be addressed in the near term
- Changes in **laws or mandates**

## Excitement for the Year Ahead

Reflecting on the priority discussion, Council members shared what excites them most about the upcoming year. Their thoughts included:

- Strategic budget development
  - Enhance financial sustainability
  - Support economic development
- Creative financing and revenue generation
- Having a clear roadmap
- Implementing the mooring ordinance
- Optimistic about the opportunities ahead

## Working Together

Council members and staff were asked to think about what they need from each other over the next year to support the pursuit of the identified priorities. Responses included:

- What does staff need from the Council?
  - Conscious of a balance of priorities falling on Economic and Community Development or other departments
  - Confidence/trust in the staff-Council partnership
  - Conscious of staff roles and Council roles
  - Mutual respect
  - Strategic priorities and direction
- What do Council members need from each other?
  - Clear communication
  - Clear direction in meetings
  - Incorporating shared norms, like those used for the retreat

## Closing

The facilitator reviewed the next steps, including the preparation of this report, and noted that the Council priorities will inform areas of emphasis for the FY2025-26 budget and that major work plan elements will be developed by staff to track progress on the priorities. The City Manager thanked the Council for their direction coming from the priorities and informed them that the staff would be developing the work plans as discussed. The City Manager and Mayor both thanked the group for their attendance and participation, and the Mayor closed the retreat.

**APPENDIX A:**  
**City Staff Attendees**

| <b>Name</b>              | <b>Role</b>                                      | <b>Department</b>                  |
|--------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| Eddie Flores             | Mayor, District 5                                | Council                            |
| Mark Addiego             | Vice-Mayor, District 1                           | Council                            |
| Buenaflor (Flor) Nicolas | Councilmember, District 3                        | Council                            |
| James Coleman            | Councilmember, District 2                        | Council                            |
| Mark Nagales             | Councilmember, District 4                        | Council                            |
| Sharon Ranals            | City Manager                                     | City Manager's Office              |
| Rich Lee                 | Assistant City Manager                           | City Manager's Office              |
| Christina Fernandez      | Deputy City Manager/Chief Sustainability Officer | City Manager's Office              |
| Angenette Lau            | Communications Manager                           | City Manager's Office              |
| Devin Stenhouse          | Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer         | City Manager's Office              |
| Marie Patea              | Executive Assistant to the City Manager          | City Manager's Office              |
| Sky Woodruff             | City Attorney                                    | City Attorney                      |
| Nell Selander            | Director of Economic and Community Development   | Economic and Community Development |
| Karen Chang              | Director of Finance                              | Finance                            |
| Jason Wong               | Deputy Finance Director                          | Finance                            |
| Matt Samson              | Fire Chief                                       | Fire                               |
| Leah Lockhart            | Human Resources Director                         | Human Resources                    |
| Tony Barrera             | Information Technology Director                  | Information Technology             |
| Valerie Sommer           | Library Director                                 | Library                            |
| Rosa Govea Acosta        | City Clerk                                       | Office of the City Clerk           |
| Angela Duldulao          | Deputy Director of Parks and Recreation          | Parks and Recreation               |
| Greg Mediati             | Director of Parks and Recreation                 | Parks and Recreation               |
| Scott Campbell           | Chief of Police                                  | Police                             |
| Eunejune Kim             | Director of Public Works/City Engineer           | Public Works                       |
| Matt Ruble               | Principal Engineer                               | Public Works                       |
| Frank Risso              | City Treasurer                                   | Treasury                           |