Revitalization Efforts in San Francisco:
An Urban History Case Study of San Francisco’s Tenderloin District
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Abstract:
San Francisco’s Tenderloin District has seen many changes over the last several decades. First a haven for gambling and prostitution, then a hot spot for music and pornography, to an current mixture of ghetto dynamics and urban revitalization. This research focuses on urban land-use changes in this district using geographic and ethnographic methods.

Keywords:
Revitalization, urban geography, gentrification

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Revitalization Efforts in San Francisco:

Introduction – San Francisco

The city of San Francisco, now a tourist destination known for the Golden Gate Bridge, Alcatraz, Ghirardelli Square, Fisherman’s Wharf, and Pier 39, was once a spacious area with small villages. The first people to inhabit the glove-shaped peninsula were the Ohlone tribe (SFCED, 2013). Then the Europeans came in the 1700s. Soon after, the Mission San Francisco de Asis was built and occupied by the Spanish. Years later in 1848, San Francisco became a part of the United States, along with all of California (SFCED, 2013). This was just in time for the Gold Rush in 1849 when “San Francisco’s population doubled every ten days” (SFCED, 2013). San Francisco was incorporated as an official city in 1915. The city was thriving – “San Francisco’s financial district continued to grow. Its strength and optimism were exemplified during the 1929 stock market crash when, despite the bankruptcy of financial institutions everywhere, not a single San Francisco-based bank failed” (SFCED, 2013). Soon city bonds funded the building of both the Bay Bridge and Golden Gate Bridge (SFCED, 2013). The 1960s and 1970s saw an influx of culture, discovery, and liveliness in the city. The 1990s saw the dot-com businesses swarm into the bay area, many choosing to open up shop in San Francisco.

While it is known for its diversity and wealth of languages, ethnicities, and cultures, San Francisco has very distinct neighborhoods. In geographic terms, the “sense of place” can literally change when one crosses a street or turns a corner. The existence of these distinct neighborhoods has had varying effects on the city as a whole. It draws people in, but then it sections them off into their respective categories. This is very clearly felt in the Tenderloin district. The Tenderloin is a 31-block neighborhood in the heart of San Francisco, filled with vibrant character and a rich history [see Map I]. It serves as a home to the city’s homeless, drug-addicted, mentally ill, elderly, and Southeast Asian refugees.

Introduction – Tenderloin District

Like the city at large, the Tenderloin district has a rich history. It was once a lively place – a destination, rather than a neighborhood of which to steer clear. While some may not support the various movements that saw their heydays in the Tenderloin, it was, nevertheless, a springboard for many different movements and groups. From before San Francisco was officially a city, the Tenderloin district has seen wave after wave of unique passions pass through. While exciting for their time, these movements were fleeting. Today, one would not be quick to guess that the Tenderloin was once the place notable musicians came to record their albums.

To give the reader an idea of all that this neighborhood has experienced, a timeline of the past century is below:

1900s-1920s: “The Paris of America”, women’s rights
1920s-1930s – gambling, prostitution
1940s- mid-1950s – WWII, Gay Bars
Mid-1950s to mid-1960s – growing music scene
1960s – Gay Movement [see Figure 1]
Mid-1960s-mid-1970s – pornography [see Figure 2], Hilton hotel built, housing disasters

Figure 1: Lyon & Martin - gay and lesbian movement activists
Source: Tenderloin Museum
1970s-1980s – community gathered, neighborhood rezoned, positive progress for SROs (single-room occupancy)

Mid-1980s-2000s – regression … the Sizzler, Boeddeker Park, Hotel Hotline program
Mid-2000s to PRESENT: surge of nonprofits, community initiatives.

Long-term residents of this neighborhood have experienced it all. Once a place that drew people in for shows, music, liveliness, and fun ranging from legal to illegal, the Tenderloin now seems lifeless in comparison. The Tenderloin, though, still holds so much character and importance. It is one of the most ethnically diverse neighborhoods in the Bay Area. It is a safe place for those without a home. People are allowed to sleep on the streets between the hours of 6pm and 6am. It has, by far, the most free services for people [see Tables A – E]. It is, whether or not one appreciates this notion, the place where the down and out are allowed to reside. San Francisco without the Tenderloin would not be the same. It simply could never be because the city does not want these people in other neighborhoods. The 31-block neighborhood, while it may seem to be an eye sore to outsiders, is invaluable – absolutely vital, to San Francisco’s well-being.

Walking through the Tenderloin District in San Francisco today is a sensory overload. Sights of people sleeping along the sidewalks, run-down hotels, and graffiti along the sides of buildings. Smells of marijuana, human waste, and trash. Sounds of cars honking at people wandering in the streets, fights breaking out, and fire trucks passing by with their sirens blaring.

Is this a poverty issue? The US Census states that “if a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty” (United States Census Bureau). Merriam-Webster defines poverty as “the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions” (Merriam-Webster). World traveler, author, and executive director of Acumen, Jacqueline Novogratz defines poverty as “a condition about choice, and the lack of freedom” (Novogratz, 2009). In a place like sub-Saharan Africa, poverty looks like people walking miles to draw water from a well, children with bulging stomachs due to malnutrition, and ailing people unable to access medical help. The Tenderloin is something different. A different kind of poverty. In a place like the “skid row” of a popular American city, poverty looks like people wandering for hours with nowhere to go, pieces of cardboard spread out on the sidewalk for a bed, and people staring off into the distance, unresponsive.

Today, the Tenderloin sits at an interesting crossroads. It has such a unique history and it is inhabited by people from a multitude of cultures as well as a range of generations. In more recent decades, the Tenderloin has seen an influx of nonprofit organizations move
Revitalization Efforts in San Francisco:...........

into the neighborhood. A number of initiatives have been put into play in hopes of reviving the neighborhood. While it seems that people are beginning to pour into the neighborhood, questions surely arise. Will this swell of nonprofits pass just as the other movements have in the neighborhood’s past? Are the current efforts truly benefitting the neighborhood? What constitutes “helping” the Tenderloin anyways? Is it what the long-term residents want? Or what the governmental officials want? Or what the new residents want? What is best for the neighborhood as a whole? And how can that be nurtured?

This article seeks to analyze pieces of the Tenderloin’s past, survey present efforts to revive the neighborhood, and then make recommendations for a healthier, stronger future.

Research Question
Q 1) How can past and current revitalization efforts in the Tenderloin district guide future plans for the neighborhood’s well-being?
Q 1a) What efforts have worked well in the past?
Q 1b) What is currently working well?
Q 1c) What should be implemented that has not yet been?

Before making claims about what is “best” for the Tenderloin district, certain terms and/or ideas must be clearly defined. Depending upon the person, there are differing opinions about what should be done in and for this neighborhood. Homeless residents, low-income housing residents, Tenderloin business owners, Tenderloin nonprofit workers, and government workers will all have varying ideas of the need of the neighborhood. Even still, tourists and owners of businesses located just outside of the neighborhood will surely have their own opinions as well.

The following are definitions to relevant terms:

Revitalization
According to Merriam-Webster to revitalize is “to make [someone or something] active, healthy, or energetic again; to give new life or vigor to.” The Tenderloin is in need of revitalization – of a wind that blows new life into the neighborhood. Revitalization is not about making something brand new. It is the act of taking something without life and bringing it back to life. When this paper speaks of revitalization of the Tenderloin, it is NOT referring to gentrification of any sort. Gentrification is bringing something foreign and “out of place” into a neighborhood for economic gain or social attractiveness. Revitalization goes deeper – it connects with the roots of a place. It seeks to highlight the beauty and vibrancy that the place once experienced in its past.

“Help/benefit” the Tenderloin
What does it mean to “help” the Tenderloin? Something that would benefit the Tenderloin is something that sits well with the majority of its residents – the SRO-dwellers, the Southeast Asian immigrants, and the homeless. An initiative that serves one group’s needs, but simultaneously creates hardships for one or more other groups is NOT benefitting the neighborhood as a whole. Issue arise when so many efforts are made to “help,” but these efforts leave some residents feeling angry, rejected, or disadvantaged.

Healthy neighborhood
A “healthy neighborhood” is one in which the vast majority of its residents not only feel safe, encouraged, and known, but it is one where they actually are safe, encouraged, and known. Does this mean that every single person has a pristine, low-cost SRO and makes a
certain amount of money? No, not necessarily. Of course, the goal would be for every person to have a home, but the Tenderloin can reach “healthy neighborhood” status before that point. The Tenderloin was (and should still be) known as a place for the city’s homeless, outcasts, and addicted to call home. Kicking these people out of the neighborhood is absolutely not the way to a healthy Tenderloin, but creating a supportive, peaceful environment is.

Methods
Information for this paper was gathered from a variety of sources. Randy Shaw’s newest book titled *The Tenderloin: Sex, Crime, and Resistance in the Heart of San Francisco* was foundational in the understanding of the chronological history of the neighborhood. This book was read in its entirety, contributing a significant amount of material to this paper, including many quotes. There are several video clips about the Tenderloin district. The videos were posted fairly recently, and while from unprofessional sources, they give a raw picture of the neighborhood and those living in it today. Also fundamental in the research for this paper were a collection of many journal articles, newspaper clippings, and government reports about topics relating to the Tenderloin. Topics ranged from issues of housing to rezoning to immigration to parks. Several maps of the neighborhood and statistics published by the San Francisco government were studied.

For perspective, the author drew on her 10-week experience living in the Tenderloin district in the summer of 2015. She was an intern at a nonprofit organization called Youth With A Mission (YWAM) located on the south side of Ellis Street between Taylor and Jones. In December of 2015, the author visited the newly opened Tenderloin Museum. During that visit, she was able to go on a tour with guide Garland Kyle, speak with Executive Director Bill Fricker, and walk through the exhibits. Since the launch of this project, the author, a Fresno native, visited the city (and, specifically, the Tenderloin district) four times. During those visits, pictures were taken to personally document a handful of the notable places and programs in the neighborhood.

A handful of people who have personal and/or professional connections to the Tenderloin district were contacted via email. These people include Garland Kyle – museum tour guide, Bill Fricker – museum Executive Director, Amy Cohen – Director of Neighborhood Program Development for the city of San Francisco, Tim Svoboda – director of YWAM, Kevin Tsui – former YWAM staff and former resident of the Tenderloin for over 8 years, and Jolene Harris – current YWAM staff and current resident of the Tenderloin. Responses were received from Kevin Tsui, Tim Svoboda, and Amy Cohen. Their words and the sources they recommended were extremely valuable.

The objective in the methodology for this paper was to collect a wealth of information from different types of sources. In writing about the health of a neighborhood that is a home to the homeless, overlooked, and sometimes unwanted, it is especially crucial to gather information from those with differing perspectives. The journal articles and government documents give a factual, objective standpoint. The videos and interviews add in the necessary subjective perspectives of what actually happens on the streets from day to day.

As data were collected and experiences were analyzed, a picture of revitalization in the TL began to form. From sources on the history of the neighborhood, past revitalization
efforts were studied. From sources about the present day as well as interviews and the author’s own recent experiences, current revitalization efforts were examined. With all sources in mind and the insightful suggestions of locals, beneficial plans are drawn for the Tenderloin’s future in promoting its health and well-being.

Findings - Past
There are several events that brought life into the Tenderloin district. These are not so much re-vitalization efforts as they are vital moments in the neighborhood’s history, giving it its unique character.

In the early 1900s, the Tenderloin was bustling with single, working people, including women. At this point in time, women were beginning to become more independent (roaring 20’s) and fight for their rights. The Tenderloin served as a place where single, working women could live and then walk to work in Union Square or the Financial District. The city (and country) as a whole took sides on how they perceived these up-and-coming women. A plaque in the Tenderloin Museum recounts the city of San Francisco’s response to this movement in the Tenderloin, “Where some saw independent women, others saw loose women. Local newspapers fanned the moral flames. In 1917, a public campaign led to the closing of most Tenderloin’s dance halls and parlor houses” (Uptown Tenderloin, Inc., 2015). Whether or not one agrees with the decision to close the halls and houses in the Tenderloin, these places not only drew residents of the neighborhood, but also those living outside of the neighborhood, looking for a good time. The Tenderloin benefited from this time period because it experienced an influx of people and money, giving life to the neighborhood.

Another interesting piece of the Tenderloin’s past is its gambling phase. From the early 1900’s until about halfway through the century, gambling was a favorite past time of city-dwellers. The Tenderloin Museum explains, “Men and women came to the Tenderloin to play cards, throw dice, shoot pool and bet on races at Bay Area horse and dog tracks. Gambling brought customers to local restaurants, bars and shops. In doing so, it helped the Tenderloin prosper for decades” (Uptown Tenderloin, Inc., 2015). While some found frustration in the newly independent women, others found it in the neighborhood’s backing of gambling. Gambling and the environment in which it usually takes place can be seen as vices. Yet, subjectivity aside, gambling helped the neighborhood to flourish. It drew people in from all across the city, and these people were spending their money on more than just games. Alas, legal gambling would not last, and “In the early 1930s, San Francisco banned slots and other machines that could be used for gambling” (Uptown Tenderloin, Inc., 2015). In doing so, the government may have been attempting to help its constituents make wiser financial choices, but it negatively affected the economic position of the Tenderloin.

There is an affinity for music, particularly jazz, in the Tenderloin’s history. In the 40’s and 50’s, the neighborhood was home to many nightclubs and recording studios. Soon, big-name artists were coming to record and perform. One of the better known places was called the Blackhawk nightclub [see Figure 3]. It was located on the corner of Turk and Hyde in 1949. According to the Tenderloin

Figure 3: Lost Landmark – Blackhawk Jazz Club
Museum, “The dark, tiny room soon became the city’s center for world jazz” (Uptown Tenderloin, Inc., 2015). Today, the location is home to an empty, run-down parking lot, leaving little trace of what was once there.

Following the end of the Vietnam War, the United States saw a wave of immigrants make their way over from Southeast Asia. In 1965, the Hart-Cellar Immigration Act officially welcomed these immigrants and “the state was set for a profound regeneration of dying inner-cities across America” (Robinson, 1994). San Francisco, and the Tenderloin district in particular, became a beacon for many immigrants. Robinson explains that the combination of the low rent, the ability to overcrowd, and the nearness to Chinatown were the factors that drew almost 10,000 Southeast Asians to the Tenderloin (Robinson, 1994). The results were extremely positive for the neighborhood as a whole. Many of the immigrants were children, and soon after the immigrants arrived, the neighborhood’s first park for children was built (Robinson, 1994). The presence of children alone greatly impacted the place. As described by the Tenderloin Museum, “For the first time, the Tenderloin – long home to single adults and the elderly – bustled with thousands of young kids” (Uptown Tenderloin, Inc., 2015). One police officer shared, “what I have seen in the past ten years…is exactly the total change in the complexion of the community. Suddenly now we have children running around. I mean, to see in the morning school buses going down [to the Tenderloin]; it’s a beautiful sight…My God what a change {Foley c. 1988}” (Robinson, 1994). While the presence of children did not effectively rid the neighborhood of its vices, it absolutely changed the demographics, needs, and perception of the district.

Along with significant influential events, there were several past initiatives that positively affected the neighborhood.

Geographers consider the importance of land-use rules and regulations in impacting a particular space. The Tenderloin’s geographical location has proved to be a double-edged sword over time. The zoning reflects the fact that the neighborhood is literally next door to tourist-saturated Union Square, Powell Station, and the northeast portion of Market Street as well as the Financial District. In 1985, there were new zoning laws set in place (Uptown Tenderloin, Inc., 2015) [see Figure 4]. The majority of the neighborhood is orange, signifying high density residential-commercial combined zoning where businesses are on the first floor with low-income housing above. The purple, gray, and red sections represent neighborhood commercial, public, and downtown general zones, respectively. Executive Director of the Tenderloin Housing Clinic, Randy Shaw, explains in his book, “While challenges remained, the key land use protections were in place to protect the Tenderloin’s low-income residential character” (Shaw, The Tenderloin: Sex, Crime, and Resistance in the Heart of San Francisco, 2015).

Another piece of the Tenderloin’s history includes the publication of the Tenderloin Times. For two decades, this paper served as a means of circulating stories and updates to
Revitalization Efforts in San Francisco:

By 1985, this modest paper was being printed in Thai, Khmer, Vietnamese, and English (Robinson, 1994). The Tenderloin Times brought unity to the neighborhood by distributing information to its residents who were able to read about current events in their native language. Unfortunately, this paper fizzled out in the late 1990’s. Randy Shaw writes how the loss “contributed to the sense of failed dreams that pervaded the Tenderloin through the 1990’s and into a new century” (Shaw, The Tenderloin..., 2015).

In 1985, a revolutionary measure was passed. Many of the hotel-turned-SROs in the Tenderloin were granted 99-year leases. From 1985 until 2084, these buildings would be locked into their current purpose of providing low-income housing. Former Tenderloin resident and nonprofit staff member, Kevin Tsui, speaks of these leases, “allowing nonprofit [to obtain] 99 year leases in 1985 ensured two things: that there would always be a place for the poor in San Francisco, and that there would always be a city-mandated revenue stream for the individual owners of SRO apartment complexes with a client base that receives Government Assistance in the “Care not Cash” initiative” (Tsui, 2016). In their book Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture, Brook et. Al, write, “The Residential Hotel Ordinance is arguably the most successful land-use regulation in San Francisco history, having accomplished its goal of preserving the city’s largest supply of low-cost housing” (Brook, Carlsson, & Peters, 1998).

While this measure secured the existence of SROs in the neighborhood, it did not address the quality or operation of them. In 1982, Mayor Feinstein implemented the hotel hotline program, which created the environment for people to rent rooms for only a couple of nights at a time (Tenderloin Housing Clinic, 2014). This caused many issues for those who considered the Tenderloin their home, rather than just a place to pass through. In 1988, the Modified Payment Program replaced the hotel hotline program, changing transient residents to permanent residents and bringing more stability to the neighborhood (Shaw, The Tenderloin..., 2015).

Not only is the Tenderloin home to many Southeast Asians, but it is also home to a community of Indian-Americans, many of whom are owners of the SROs in the neighborhood. There are three brothers in particular who own SROs – Charlie, Rama, and Rainbow Patel; these men have chosen to lease their buildings to nonprofits in the neighborhood rather than choosing an option that would yield a higher profit (Shaw, The Tenderloin..., 2015). These men participate in the Modified Payment Plan in which the government sends residents’ checks to the nonprofits who then write the rent checks to the owners and distribute the remaining amount to their tenants. This helps to eliminate missed rent payments as well as personal mismanagement of money.

In the early 1980’s, a handful of big-name hotels (Holiday Inn, Ramada, Hilton) were ready to put up buildings in the Tenderloin because of its close proximity to Union Square. Nonprofit staff, residents, and most-anyone who had a vested interest in preserving the character of the Tenderloin were not thrilled about these plans. Shaw explains, “These luxury projects would surely drive up property values, leading to further development and, ultimately, the destruction of the low-income residential neighborhood” (Shaw, Beating Back..., 2015). This proved a difficult battle because the developer’s plans to build a big hotel would not displace current residents (Shaw, Beating Back..., 2015). In the end, the Hilton was granted permission to build. A massive hotel was built on Taylor and Ellis, right on the line separating the two neighborhoods. While those against this project did not officially “win,” Shaw explains, “the terms of the approval gave the Tenderloin an historic victory. It created a national precedent for cities requiring
private developers to provide community benefits as a condition of approving their projects” (Shaw, Beating Back…, 2015).

There are two especially notable organizations that formed and existed to promote the neighborhood’s health and well-being. The first was the North of Market Planning Coalition (NOMPC). This group served to bring the community’s residents together to work toward making the neighborhood a better home for everyone. In an article, Shaw states, “The first community meeting on July 16, 1980 brought nearly 100 low-income and primarily elderly Tenderloin residents to express their concerns. This was a remarkably high first turnout for an unorganized and politically disenfranchised neighborhood” (Shaw, Beating Back…, 2015). While the organization is no longer in existence the NOMPC had established the Tenderloin as a recognizable residential neighborhood deserving of protection (Shaw, Beating Back…, 2015). The NOMPC and other similar groups were able to see SRO improvements. Improvements included things such as heating, permission for visitors, individual mail boxes, etc. (Shaw, The Tenderloin…, 2015). Possibly more important, if not equally important, was the personal need this organization filled for so many residents. Shaw writes, “Community campaigns filled a void in many Tenderloin residents’ lives, and NOMPC staff celebrated birthdays and even small victories with cake and other refreshments that boosted people’s sense of belonging” (Shaw, The Tenderloin…, 2015).

Another organization was the Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation (TNDC). This was started in 1981 with the mission “to transform the lives of the poor and marginalized residents of unsafe and poorly maintained housing in the Tenderloin and to protect the Tenderloin from the seemingly inevitable gentrification…” (TNDC, 2015). This organization purchases buildings in the TL, effectively taking them off the market and securing them as low-income housing (TNDC, 2015).

One man, in particular, was a cornerstone figure in the revitalizing the neighborhood. His name was Leroy Looper, and he was a charismatic man with a crazy story. Shaw writes, “Looper had been a homeless teenager who learned how to sleep outside at an angle in order to prevent his shoes or clothes from being stolen” (Shaw, The Tenderloin…, 2015). He moved from New York to the Tenderloin and opened Reality House, “the city’s first 24-hour detoxification center (Shaw, The Tenderloin…, 2015). He then purchased the Cadillac Hotel on the corner of Eddy and Leavenworth and became the first nonprofit organization to renovate an SRO into permanent low-income housing (Shaw, The Tenderloin…, 2015). Looper made it a habit to get involved, develop friendships, and connect others. Randy writes, “Leroy’s mantra was that the Tenderloin has too many problems for people not to work together” (Shaw, The Tenderloin…, 2015). The neighborhood greatly benefited (and still benefits) from the actions and choices of Leroy Looper.

While there were many beautiful, constructive events, initiatives, and moments in the Tenderloin’s past, there are definitely events and initiatives that failed.

One hopeful endeavor that did not achieve success was the opening of a Sizzler’s restaurant in the Tenderloin district. Leroy Looper was especially excited about the prospects of having a family restaurant in the neighborhood for residents as well as to drawn in tourists and families (Shaw, The Tenderloin…, 2015). The restaurant opened in
1986 and closed just 5 years later in 1991 because of issues including expensiveness, lack of parking, and fear of safety (Shaw, The Tenderloin..., 2015). Leroy Looper was incredibly upset by the restaurant’s closure because he felt that the city did not hold up its end of the deal; it did not crack down on the “bad” stuff happening on the streets, which would have calmed fears of potential customers (Shaw, The Tenderloin..., 2015). Writing of the restaurant, Shaw says, “We didn’t recognize it at the time, but the Sizzler’s closure was part of a larger story of the Tenderloin’s unexpected downturn. Instead of 1986 launching a brighter Tenderloin future, it began two decades of decline” (Shaw, The Tenderloin..., 2015).

In 1979, the Tenderloin district was the only neighborhood without a park (Shaw, The Tenderloin..., 2015). This changed on May 1, 1985, when Boeddeker Park opened at Eddy and Jones, “giving the Tenderloin its long sought open space for seniors and other residents” (Shaw, The Tenderloin..., 2015). Soon after its opening, though, the park began to experience many issues: the spiked fence was found to be uninviting, an area within the park known as “the Gauntlet” was used for drug deals, and people hung out there between eating meals at Glide (Shaw, The Tenderloin..., 2015). As a result, the seniors living at the surrounding three hotels began to leave, changing the nearby demographics (Shaw, The Tenderloin..., 2015). The people whom the park was built for were not benefitting from it. Shaw writes, “Boeddeker Park went from being a beacon of neighborhood hope to a troubled drug supermarket” (Shaw, The Tenderloin..., 2015). The city attempted to fix things, but to no avail. The park hours were limited and then the park was eventually closed altogether (Shaw, The Tenderloin..., 2015).

One more initiative came through a lady named Ms. Carolyn Abst. Ms. Abst moved into the neighborhood in hopes of cleaning it up and planting trees (White, 2006). In his article, White explains, “she was bringing in jobs and ideas to revitalize the area” when “‘Wanted’ posters went up around the Tenderloin last year, featuring Ms. Abst’s photo. Someone circulated pamphlets disparaging her. Residents yelled at her in the street” (White, 2006). Residents did not take kindly to Ms. Abst’s efforts. She was trying to plant 400 trees in the area, and stated, “I had no idea that cleanliness, beauty and safety could get people so riled up” (White, 2006). She hired homeless youth to plant trees for $6 a day, and some residents considered this act to be “exploitative” (White, 2006). While planting trees seems to be harmless enough, there were clearly reasons why this initiative did not sit well with those who called the Tenderloin home. It may have been Ms. Abst’s attitude toward those living on the streets. It may have come across as an impersonal, external attempt to fix problems. It may also have been the fact that Ms. Abst had the first two trees planted in front of her own home (White, 2006).

Another, more recent, initiative that has yet to be implemented concerns city street planning. One may not think twice about one-way streets, other than the frustration caused by the sometimes necessary circles one has to make to arrive at a particular location. One way streets are actually a city planning strategy used to speed up traffic flow. It is one of a handful of lower-cost tactics to implement to increase traffic movement without say, building a new freeway. The presence of one-way streets, though, has negatively impacted the Tenderloin district. This is because one-way streets effectively discourage drivers from stopping at local businesses. In the early 2000s, the suggestion was made to change some of the Tenderloin’s streets back into two-way streets. Shaw writes, “Residents overwhelmingly backed two-way streets, which slow traffic and lead drivers to stop at local businesses. The Board of Supervisors unanimously passed the Plan in 2007 but allocated no funds for its implementation” (Shaw, The
Tenderloin..., 2015). Now, at the beginning of 2016, this plan still has not been acted upon.

Lastly, the police and city government at large have played a significant role in the neighborhood’s vitality in the past century or so.

For a while, there was not a police station located in the Tenderloin. This was because the neighborhood was split into two separate districts. The Tenderloin Task Force was created in 1991 as a response to rising crime rates (Tenderloin Station). In 2000, the present-day Tenderloin Police Station opened at 301 Eddy Street (Tenderloin Station). Based on area, the station is the smallest police district out of ten in the city (Tenderloin Station) [see Table II]. The perception of law enforcement over the past decades is not the most positive. Partially because their presence has not been consistent; partially because their actions/attitudes when present have not been consistent either. One local recounts a time when the law enforcement sought to “better” the neighborhood, “...and they decided to clean it up – get rid of the hookers, get rid of a lot of things... police chiefs decided they were gonna start herding people around and start cleaning things up” (Fusco, 2012). While police officers cannot and should not be buddy-buddy with residents, there is a way to do a quality job without degrading people, especially those without a home. The author has witnessed the unnecessary badgering of people on the streets of the Tenderloin. These interactions fuel anger and resentment and can be degrading and demoralizing. She has also witnessed officers kindly asking people of the streets to relocate. Gentleness and respect often beget calmness and compliance. Law enforcement and residents have yet to find a common understanding of what to expect/what to allow of each other for the betterment of the neighborhood as a whole.

During the time that Ronald Reagan was governor of California, one very relevant decision directly affected the well-being of the Tenderloin. Former resident, Kevin Tsui, highlights “…the case of Governor Reagan closing down the mental health institutions in California” as one of the most detrimental events in the Tenderloin’s history (Tsui, 2016). He mentions that California would not be able to provide these services today anyways due to budget restrictions, but that the abrupt closure greatly impacted the neighborhood (Tsui, 2016). Many people who once called a mental institution home, now had to call the streets of the Tenderloin home because they had nowhere else to go. This dramatically changed the atmosphere on the streets of the neighborhood.

Findings - Present
Past failures have not stopped people from launching new initiatives to revitalize the neighborhood today. The following are several new and/or current happenings in the Tenderloin.
Boeddeker Park whose gates were shut years before is now opened today and flourishing. The old park was leveled and rebuilt; the $8 million project began in 2012 and the park was reopened in December of 2014 (Shaw, The Tenderloin…, 2015). Today, residents and any passersby will hear children playing on the jungle gym, see seniors going on walks around the park’s periphery, witness volunteers coaching kids in playing soccer, and get a glimpse of a Zumba class being held in the studio located inside the park. The park is colorful and spacious. Museum tour guide Garland Kyle explained how the park fence was designed in a way that is inviting rather than opposing (Kyle, 2015). The fence has thin rails that have leaves and flowers built into them [see Figure 5]. The park is open during the day, creating a safe space for kids to be kids and the elderly to enjoy being outdoors.

The neighborhood is filled with paintings and graffiti. Director of the nonprofit Youth With A Mission located on Ellis Street, Tim Svoboda, said, “Behind every beautiful painting is pain” (YWAM San Francisco, 2014). These murals tell stories and recount history. One mural in particular by Mona Caron is a recent addition to the neighborhood. It is unique in that the mural includes a picture of what a specific street corner looks like today and a picture of what people dream of that corner looking like one day [see Figures 6 &7]. Better yet, Caron painted real Tenderloin residents into the murals! One of the best experiences is to stand looking at the mural and have people walk up and point out themselves in the mural. There is a sense of pride and belonging that is communicated through their smile and eagerness to show observers.

Due to the efforts and generosity of countless people and organizations, the Tenderloin is home to a plethora of free goods and services. One may be surprised by just how much is available at no-cost to those who are in need. Each quarter, and updated lists of goods and services are published online for the community’s benefit. There are five free food places located in the Tenderloin district (and many more city-wide) (Free Print Shop, 2016). If
one times it right and is willing to wait in line, he/she will never go hungry. There are six places that offer medical help located in the neighborhood, and there are places to contact about getting surgery at no-cost (Free Print Shop, 2016). There are four food pantries located in the neighborhood as well as other programs such as Food Stamps and WIC (Free Print Shop, 2016). There is also the San Francisco-Marin County Food Bank that has distribution sites located in the Tenderloin. There are three shelters in the neighborhood (Free Print Shop, 2016). In regards to mental health and well-being, there is a directory with twenty-four phone number to call including 24-hour hotlines and services in multiple languages (Free Print Shop, 2016). Today, in the Tenderloin, there may not be enough affordable housing for everyone, but there is absolutely enough food and services to take care of some of the most-basic needs of human life.

The Tenderloin National Forest is a new addition to the neighborhood. The “national forest” is located in what used to be an empty lot along Ellis Street. It was formerly known as Cohen Alley, where it was used as a “dumping ground for hypodermic needles and garbage” (Tenderloin National Forest: SAN FRANCISCO, 2011). A nonprofit called the Luggage Store Gallery had the idea to create a public green space for all to come and enjoy and garden (Tenderloin National Forest: SAN FRANCISCO, 2011). The forest is beautiful, filled with huge trees, lush bushes and flowers, artwork, ponds with fish, and hanging lights. Once a month, an artist named Michael Swaine brings a mobile sewing cart and mends clothing for free (Tenderloin National Forest: SAN FRANCISCO, 2011). In terms of money, “The site is now officially sanctioned by the city, which charges the gallery a symbolic annual rent of $1” (Tenderloin National Forest: SAN FRANCISCO, 2011). The one caveat with the Tenderloin National Forest is its “hours of operation.” Its bright red gate is supposedly open from noon to five every day (Tenderloin National Forest: SAN FRANCISCO, 2011). This, unfortunately, is not true. The author has passed by the forest countless times, but she has only seen it open twice.

Another very recent addition to the neighborhood is the Tenderloin Museum [see Figure 8]. It is located on the corner of Eddy and Leavenworth, and it opened in the fall of 2015. This place exists to preserve the rich culture of the Tenderloin, to share of its history, to attract non-residents into the neighborhood, and to serve as an event space. Randy Shaw says of the museum, “The Tenderloin desperately needed evening activities to bring positive foot traffic into the area, and the museum would be one of the venues to help achieve this” (Shaw, The Tenderloin…, 2015). The museum has a beautiful gallery and offers one-hour tours of the neighborhood.
Yet another neighborhood initiative is called the Tenderloin Pit Stop [see Figure 9]. This was a pilot project that made available “public toilets and sinks, containers for used needles and dog waste stations” (Gordon, 2014). The project was set to run for 6 months, at 3 portable locations, Tuesday through Friday from 2pm-9pm, with paid staff (Gordon, 2014). This was a response to the issue of human excrement on the streets of the Tenderloin. One does not need more than a few seconds to smell how much this is an issue. A June 2014 report states that 55% of the reports of human excrement on streets and sidewalks in the city were found in the Tenderloin (Gordon, 2014). The report also noted that most of these were seen in corners, showing someone looking for privacy (Gordon, 2014). The goal was to make the toilets available after the nonprofits are closed and a few hours after dinner (Gordon, 2014). This initiative was granted more money and continues to operate (Bay City News, 2015).

One more new initiative is called Four Corner Fridays. This monthly event began at the beginning of 2015 (Nevius, 2015). The purpose is simple – “to strengthen the relationships among neighbors in the Tenderloin residents, families, children, and organizations, housed and unhoused (Events Calendar: 4 Corner Friday, 2015). There are five intersections that are closed to traffic and open to musicians, chalk, crafts, etc.

One last example of an initiative to benefit the neighborhood is called Safe Passage. This is a program where volunteers are stationed along the streets of the neighborhood when kids are walking to and from school. There are yellow “footprint”-like spots painted on the sidewalks that follow the route of the children. The presence of the adults keeps children safe from traffic accidents as well as potential harassment from adults hanging around on the streets. This effort is a reminder to the entire neighborhood of the importance of caring for children as they grow up. Tenderloin Safe Passage has been around since 2012, and they estimate that there are 4,000 children living in the neighborhood (Tenderloin Safe Passage).

Several organizations continue to invest in the Tenderloin, breathing new life into the neighborhood.

Reverend Cecil Williams became pastor of Glide Methodist Memorial Church in 1963 (Uptown Tenderloin, Inc., 2015). His

![Figure 10: Reverend Cecil Williams of Glide](Source: Tenderloin Museum)

![Figure 11: Glide Memorial Methodist Church](Source: Singh, Jenna (Photographer))
charisma and his stance on many controversial issues drew huge crowds of people to Glide on Sundays [see Figure 10]. Today, Glide offers countless goods and services to the people of the Tenderloin every day of the week [see Figure 11]. Glide serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner 364 days a year. They serve food until it runs out. While they do not have the most beautiful dining room and the whole process of waiting in line, getting a ticket, receiving a tray of food, and being ushered back onto the streets feels very regimented and systematic, Glide serves thousands each day, providing the homeless and/or low-income community with food to live.

The Gubbio Project is a unique way to serve the homeless of the Tenderloin.

This organization rents out the back two-thirds of the pews at St. Boniface Catholic Church (Kyle, 2015) [see Figure 10]. Here anyone can come to sleep, uninterrupted, during the day. It is illegal to sleep on the sidewalks between the hours of 6am and 6pm. Often, though, people feel safer sleeping during the day. The Gubbio Project provides this safe space for people. During the day, the church continues to hold services. Their pamphlet states, “This sends a powerful message to our neighbors without homes – they are in essence part of the community, not to be kicked out when people who are housed come in to worship” (The Gubbio Project: Sacred Sleep and Sanctuary) [see Figure 11].

In recent decades, the Tenderloin has attracted a plethora of nonprofit organizations who have made their home in the neighborhood. A plaque in the Tenderloin Museum states, “It is estimated that over 25% of the housing here is owned or run by nonprofits, more than any other neighborhood” (Uptown Tenderloin, Inc.,...
Revitalization Efforts in San Francisco:

One, in particular, is called Youth With A Mission. Since 1995, it has been at 357 Ellis Street, and its back door looks out over the beautifully redone Boeddeker Park [see Figure 14]. YWAM opens its doors to the people of the Tenderloin every weekday morning. People can come in to use the bathroom, shower, make a phone call, play pool, play the piano, use a microwave, read, sleep, seek help, and make friends. Each afternoon, the “Ellis Room” is utilized for something different. Monday afternoons are nail days for the women and transgender community in the Tenderloin. Tuesday afternoons are a normal hang-out time, sometimes with a movie playing. Wednesday afternoons are Bible study, led by a Tenderloin native who has a beautiful story of redemption. Thursday afternoons, the Ellis Room turns into a Food Pantry, as a distribution site for the County Food Bank. During the summer on Friday afternoons, the Ellis Room becomes a free sit-down restaurant for guests living on the streets of the Tenderloin. The purpose of this place is to meet both physical and relational needs. It is one thing to give out food, but it is another to sit with a person and become his/her friend.

According to records from the Tenderloin Museum, “In 1950, Franciscan friar Alfred Boeddeker opened St. Anthony’s Dining Room on Jones at Golden Gate” (Uptown Tenderloin, Inc., 2015). Recently, the dining hall was remodeled, and now it is a beautiful space. Tour guide Garland Kyle pointed out how the building had been designed with a covered walkway to keep the majority of people waiting in line out of the rain and/or wind (Kyle, 2015). St. Anthony’s only serves lunch, but it is a multi-course, very well-made meal. The month’s menu is posted on their door so guests can know in advance what to expect. Brook et. Al write, “These days, the dining room’s staff and volunteers are serving more meals than ever, nearly 2,000 hot lunches to some 1,200 people, most of them homeless or with incomes so low they can’t afford their own food” (Brook, Carlsson, & Peters, 1998).

In 1977, the Southeast Asian-run Vietnamese Youth Development Center (VYDC) was founded (Robinson, 1994). This nonprofit began as an initiative to support the youth of refugee families as they arrived in the neighborhood. Danny Ong describes, “I looked around for a life-preserver and I found the Vietnamese Youth Development Center… I talked to the counselors, and they helped me work through things. They became my role models” (MSMC, 2015). While there are no longer refugees entering the neighborhood, there remains a significant Southeast Asian population. VYDC continues to pour into these youth (Home Page, 2016).

A newer coalition of 31 individual member organizations is called Market Street for the Masses (MSMC). This group believes that development is “both necessary and inevitable,” but it does not have to include displacement (MSMC, 2015). They state that displacement can be experienced both literally and psychologically (MSMC, 2015). Their current priorities are to keep residents in the neighborhood, reduce the gap between the poorest and wealthiest, create more affordable housing, and make a client that is friendly for small businesses and nonprofits (MSMC, 2015). Their current projects include group housing at Turk and Leavenworth, SF anti-displacement coalition policies, and responding to the increase in violence (MSMC, 2015).

Findings - Future

The Tenderloin is home to many non-native English speakers. Depending on the person and his/her ambitions, struggling with the English language could be a huge setback. In a recent newspaper article, Carter quote Tenderloin resident Philip, “A major stumbling block to the hood for immigrants has been language. Even those here 10 or more years
have trouble” (Carter, The Second Wave, 2015-2016). One way to benefit the neighborhood as a whole would be to offer free English classes. This would not only meet the practical need of learning the English language in order to get a job and/or facilitate everyday life interactions, but it would also serve as a way to connect community members.

Offering English language learning courses/tutoring coincides with the next recommendation: jobs. Many in the neighborhood are relying on the monthly checks they receive from the government and whatever little else they can scrounge up. Former resident Kevin Tsui states, “Now, I understand that jobs don’t materialize out of thin air so there need to be initiatives to help gear up different people for jobs” (Tsui, 2016). One of these initiatives should be the English classes/tutoring. There are many people who have lots of time to kill, without jobs or homes. Some need training in how to interview, others need a good set of clothes and a haircut, and still others need to learn a new skill.

Another thing the neighborhood desperately needs is consistency from the police. There is a police station located in the heart of the Tenderloin, but if, when, and how police respond to situations differs. There are times when the police walk the streets, poking people awake with their clubs, telling them to move. There are other times where the streets are filled with cop cars yet a cop is nowhere to be seen. Many residents, especially those with children, would like to see more of a police presence; it would help them to feel safer. Those without homes may not want to see police, but the police need to act with consistency in how they approach the homeless. Consistency is a way to build trust or at least acceptance/tolerance because there are no surprises when it comes to the handling of situations.

The plan to convert some of the one-way streets in the neighborhood into two-way streets needs to happen. It is set to be completed this year, but that remains in question (Shaw, The Tenderloin…, 2015). This is a very simple, yet potentially effective way to help the neighborhood. Completion of this project will show the neighborhood that the city is willing to spend some taxpayer dollars on the Tenderloin. That, in and of itself, is important.

As previously mentioned, the Tenderloin experienced quite a shift when the public mental hospitals were abruptly closed during Reagan’s governance. As a result, there are many on the streets of the Tenderloin battling mental disorders. This neighborhood needs someone to respond to the needs of these people. Tsui suggests this could look like “…trained counselors who have good connection with psychiatrists who aren’t wrapped around the fingers of different pharmaceutical firms so there can be the needed one-two punch to get people on their feet” (Tsui, 2016). Instead of just throwing medicine at the psychologically impaired, this neighborhood needs people to invest in them. “In the cases of illness and trauma, medicines are great for perhaps taking the edge off of persistent issues, but cannot alone treat an individual…as long as there are lobbyists for the pharmaceutical industrial complex, there is no incentive to actually treat the residents of the Tenderloin, but to medicate them with the government paying for the drugs” (Tsui, 2016).

The presence of crack cocaine and other drugs has also completely changed the atmosphere of the Tenderloin. In his article, Walter quotes SRO tenants’ advocate
Richard Marquez, “Everyone knows in the city that if you want to get heroin, you go to the Mission...If you want crack cocaine, you go to the Tenderloin” (Walter, 2011). Buzzell explains, “Once crack showed up here, it really went to hell...crack’s cheap...You’d be surprised who does it...I’ve seen people here crawling on all fours on the concrete sidewalk looking for a microscopic speck of rock that somebody may have accidentally dropped. I’ve seen people completely lose their mind on that drug” (Buzzell, 2009).

It is imperative that the Tenderloin community continue to invest in its children. The preface of a book of pictures drawn by children living in the Tenderloin reads, “They [the children] come from the Tenderloin, a community in downtown San Francisco that is the most raw, the most painful, the most horrifying, the most poor, the most addicted, the most abusive” (Children of the Tenderloin, 1989). A very significant portion of the pictures and captions include crack or a reference to it. These children need to see other options. They need to go to school and be encouraged to dream big. They should not necessarily be encouraged to get out of the neighborhood as soon as they can, but they need to understand that the neighborhood is not normal. Children can absolutely be a point of togetherness. The drug dealers put their goods away when the children walk by them. That is significant. These kids do not necessarily need to be naive about what is happening in their neighborhood, but the neighborhood needs to love and respect its children.

There are many new initiatives in the Tenderloin these days, and this shows that people are willing to invest in the neighborhood –which is a great thing. Sometimes, though, there can be countless nonprofits and programs that are supposed to benefit a group of people without actually making a meaningful difference. This is something of which the Tenderloin needs to be wary. Are the programs and events actually empowering residents? The neighborhood does not need more programs that give away free stuff. As described in this paper, there is enough food for everybody. The neighborhood does not need anybody else to come and give out free food. Residents are extremely used to handouts. And there is a time and a place for them. Right now, Glide and St. Anthony’s are carrying this burden and these organizations need to be supported. But what the neighborhood needs to see more of is initiatives that EMPOWER residents. Programs and people that champion them. The neighborhood is not lacking in food, hygiene items, or services, but it IS lacking in hope, determination, and desire for change. These things cannot be handed out like free sandwiches. They come when there are role models and people who are committed to the people who are down and out.

Finally, this neighborhood desperately needs long-term investment. Throughout its history, the Tenderloin has seen almost everything come and go. Every kind of person saw his/her heyday in the Tenderloin, but it never lasted. There is this sense that things are temporary or just passing through. Peace often comes with security. People need to see that the nonprofits, government, and peers are there and there to stay. This will create a stronger bond amongst the community. When neighbors know each other, they have those relationships that can go deeper than handouts. Residents need people to believe in them, encourage them to pursue their dreams, and support them in their endeavors. This does not happen in a day or a year, but over many years of investment and pouring out into the community.
Conclusion
In conclusion, the Tenderloin district of San Francisco is an essential neighborhood in the city. Its history is packed full of significant moments, events, and people. Today, the Tenderloin is in need of revitalization. The past is filled with efforts made to breathe life into the neighborhood; some were successful while others were not. Presently, there are many neighborhood initiatives still working to help the Tenderloin. Even still, the streets of the Tenderloin are still filled with a sense of hopelessness, darkness, and despair. The rising number of nonprofits or the decreasing number of homeless people do not necessarily equate to a healthier neighborhood at all. In the future, the Tenderloin needs to see more initiatives that empower its people. The neighborhood does not need more handouts. It needs long-term investment and consistency. These are two things that the Tenderloin has not experienced in its past where people and fads would come and go. Long-term investment and consistency need to come through the presence and attitudes of the local nonprofit staff and volunteers, business owners, police, and other government officials. With these things, the Tenderloin can be a place where residents are known, loved, and empowered.

Discussion
There are a handful of relevant implications that come from these findings. In general, one can now have a better understanding of how difficult it can be to bring change to an area. There are countless factors to consider and not all of them are controllable. Another takeaway is that there is not a comprehensive list of revitalization tactics that will positively affect a neighborhood. Revitalization efforts can and should be tailored to the specific climate of an area. Lastly, and more specifically, the Tenderloin district is in need of long-term investment and consistency. The author is moving to the city this year, and, as a result of her studies, she will find a time and place where she can build relationships with residents. Championing residents will instill in them hope and, consequently, bring new life to the Tenderloin.

Map I

Map II


Table A
(Page 1 of 1)
Revitalization Efforts in San Francisco:

Table C
(Page 1 of 2)

Table D
(Page 1 of 1)
### Table E

(Please see the table image.)

#### Picture Citations

Figure 1: Tenderloin Museum. (2015). *Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin* [photograph]. San Francisco, CA.

Figure 2: Singh, Jenna (Photographer). (2015, December). *Uptown Tenderloin Lost Landmarks – The Screening Room* [photograph]. San Francisco, CA.

Figure 3: Singh, Jenna (Photographer). (2015, December). *Uptown Tenderloin Lost Landmarks – Blackhawk Jazz Club* [photograph]. San Francisco, CA.

Figure 4: Planning Department. (2015, October). *Zoning Map*. Retrieved from City & County of San Francisco: http://www.sf-planning.org/?page=1569

Figure 5: Singh, Jenna (Photographer). (2015, December). *Boeddeker Park* [photograph]. San Francisco, CA.
Revitalization Efforts in San Francisco:..........

Figure 6: Singh, Jenna (Photographer). (2015, December). *Mona Caron’s Mural – Present Day* [photograph]. San Francisco, CA.

Figure 7: Singh, Jenna (Photographer). (2015, December). *Mona Caron’s Mural – Hope for Future* [photograph]. San Francisco, CA.

Figure 8: Singh, Jenna (Photographer). (2015, December). *Entrance to the Tenderloin Museum* [photograph]. San Francisco, CA.

Figure 9: Singh, Jenna (Photographer). (2015, December). *Tenderloin Pit Stop Poster* [photograph]. San Francisco, CA.

Figure 10: Tenderloin Museum. (2015). *Reverend Cecil Williams* [photograph]. San Francisco, CA.

Figure 11: Singh, Jenna (Photographer). (2015, December). *Glide Memorial Methodist Church* [photograph]. San Francisco, CA.

Figure 12: Singh, Jenna (Photographer). (2015, December). *Sign Outside of St. Boniface Cathedral* [photograph]. San Francisco, CA.


Figure 14: Singh, Jenna (Photographer). (2015, August). *YWAM Sign* [photograph]. San Francisco, CA.

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