

## The East Cut Community Benefit District

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Crossing at East Cut is a 3-acre city block within one of San Francisco's newest multi-use, transit-oriented neighborhoods. Once a temporary bus terminal, the site has now become a central hub for community gatherings, active recreation, entertainment and social cohesion. Operated by The East Cut Community Benefit District (The East Cut), the site is free and open to the public and activates future development parcels that would otherwise be fenced. The Crossing offers an array of activities and programs that have established it as the neighborhood's hub. These include:

- **Food & Beverage:** A beer garden and bar, food kiosks and occasional food trucks
- **Community events:** From seasonal celebrations to cultural festivals, The Crossing is the epicenter of local events. It is also home to regularly scheduled events including comedy and dance, free movie nights at the outdoor cinema, as well as hosting a summer-long series with a youth rock band.
- **Farmers Market:** One of the most requested events in the neighborhood, The East Cut continues to refine and iterate the market to meet community needs.
- **Fitness & Recreation:** LuxFit, Street Soccer USA and pickleball courts create the daily energy at the site, ensuring a healthy and connected community. The success of these fitness opportunities led directly to neighborhood residents donating two movable basketball hoops that now also see daily play, and the pickleball courts are quickly becoming one of the hottest destinations in a town clamoring for the sport.

### INNOVATION

The Crossing site is one of only a few remaining undeveloped parcels in downtown San Francisco. However, planned future developments include two affordable housing buildings, a public park and a high-rise building that would include both market rate and affordable units. The site is situated in an area of San Francisco's downtown that has the tallest high-rise buildings – both commercial and residential—and The East Cut knew that once the city no longer needed the temporary bus terminal, there would be a delay between the decommissioning of the site and the future developments. Rather than allow the space to be fenced and attract unwanted social behaviors, The East Cut lobbied the city agency that owned the site to issue an RFP for temporary activation and was fortunate to win the bid to operate the site. The overall purpose was to allow the community to make use of an otherwise abandoned property and provide opportunities for small business incubation, outdoor recreation, all-ages entertainment and a safe place for outdoor gatherings coming out of the pandemic. The East Cut is a unique neighborhood in downtown San Francisco that includes both worker and residential populations, and until the site was activated, those two demographics rarely intersected. The diverse offerings at The Crossing have shown that one centralized space that appeals to many can address the issues around downtown recovery and resiliency.

### OUTCOME

As a whole, the project has been a huge boon to The East Cut neighborhood and Downtown San Francisco. What would have been a 3-acre undeveloped city block, fenced off for over three years, has turned into the heart of a community. It has served as an incubator for small businesses, a space for nearby workers to engage in recreation after a long day and a meeting place for residents to enjoy the outdoors. The East Cut has also learned from the process by giving staff a preview of what place management will look like in the future. A 2.4-acre park is currently being designed under the I-80 freeway off-ramps and The East Cut will be the operator of the park. By taking on the day-to-day of The Crossing, the organization has learned what works and what does not when it comes to the management of open space, leases with on-site vendors and permitting for events. While it was anticipated that the activation would only operate until permanent developments started construction, the success of the space has resulted in community-requested delays for the future park space and a reframing of how the permanent park will more closely match what The Crossing offers. The activation is now scheduled to operate for at least another two years beyond the initial three-

year term. With continued patronage and the booking of private events and rentals, income has steadily increased over the last year and the project is getting closer to being self-sustaining.

## **EXECUTION**

In January 2021, the Office of Community Investment & Infrastructure (OCII), owner of the site, advertised an RFP for site activation. The East Cut, a 501(C)(3) nonprofit, partnered with Street Soccer USA, Real Active and Nestory Park to form East Cut Landing Partners (ECLP). Our proposal was accepted in March 2021, and by August, OCII negotiated the Permit to Enter (PTE) allowing ECLP to manage the site, which officially opened in September 2021. Real Active oversaw day-to-day operations, while the others handled funding, marketing and activation. The inaugural year featured grassroots additions like a ground mural, the soccer fields, a pickleball area with temporary nets, an outdoor gym, a cinema space and a community room in the former Greyhound bus depot. Despite initial success, financial challenges arose, leading to ECLP granting day-to-day control to The East Cut by the end of 2022. In 2023, operations improved, bills were settled, permanent pickleball courts were added and community events expanded, including a weekly farmer's market, free community yoga and a circus to close out 2023. The Crossing, now under The East Cut's control, is positioned to play a pivotal role in San Francisco's downtown recovery for the next one to three years.

## **REPRESENTATION**

OCII mandates that all project areas prioritize disadvantaged community involvement in temporary or permanent uses of the development sites. As such, OCII required ECLP to work toward 50% participation of small business (SBE) and disadvantaged business enterprises (DBE) in the work done at The Crossing. ECLP contracted with multiple service providers for more than two years that meet the SBE or DBE requirements, including a landscape contractor to clean up the site and repair the existing irrigation, services for overnight security, and our food and beverage operators on-site. Additionally, The East Cut has partnered with many SBE vendors to host events such as Into the Streets, a San Francisco-based Women-Owned Business, and En2action, a nonprofit that supports equitable growth and resilient communities. The majority of activities at The Crossing have been free and open to the public. This has allowed for greater accessibility for all visitors and has facilitated new relationships that are impervious to economic status and background. The pickleball courts, in particular, have attracted neighborhood residents from luxury towers and affordable housing units alike, and have shown that common interests can truly unite a community.

## **REPLICATION**

The Crossing offers a prime example of temporary activation on pre-development parcels in a city's downtown. With the advancements in multi-modal travel and improved transit systems, parking lots are now prime locations for development; however, planned developments are often beholden to the economy and construction can be delayed by months or years. The Crossing is a concrete example of how recreation and event space can be successful in a dense, office-heavy location. It also shows how a small but mighty downtown improvement district can successfully navigate the process of developing and sustaining a multi-use amenity for the general public. As noted previously, The East Cut will be the future operator of a 2.4-acre public park that will be built under the off-ramps of the I-80 freeway. This park will include a beer bar, three retail spaces, public recreation space and will host events. The information and training gained from The Crossing places The East Cut in a strong position to effectively manage the future park space.

## **COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY**

The Crossing was anticipated as a simple project in concept: take a decommissioned bus terminal and add activities for the public. The site included existing infrastructure including electrical, water, sewer and three buildings. It was believed the operation could be up and running within a month of approval; however, the organization quickly learned that because the site was fenced for over a year, there was some deferred maintenance. Additionally, ECLP was putting out leads for food operators to no avail, so the site opened with a bar, a private gym, soccer fields and not much else. Fast-forward a year and the ECLP team learned a lot, including how to properly vet vendors, the required level of stewardship and the optimal staffing levels for programming events and booking rentals. Ultimately, the most difficult part of the activation was allocating the necessary resources for an activation that is open to the public seven days a week while also meeting the demands of operating the existing downtown BID. By securing grant funds from the city and support from their board, The East Cut has been able to navigate these difficulties and offer a community asset enjoyed by residents, workers and visitors of San Francisco.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Website: <https://www.theeastcut.org/>

The Crossing: <https://www.eastcutcrossing.com/>