

524 Vallejo Street — Supervisor Brief

Why This Is Before You

We are a **young family who have lived in North Beach for 22 years**. We have built our lives here, raised our children here, and invested deeply in this neighborhood.

We are here because we want to do exactly what San Francisco has long encouraged homeowners to do: **create real, safe, livable housing**—while taking responsibility for the broader needs of our community.

This case is not about entitlement or avoiding accountability. If that were our approach, we could have simply proposed no changes at all. Instead, we chose to engage—**to work within the City's processes**, to correct a long-standing inherited issue, and to contribute meaningful housing value back to North Beach.

At a time when accountability is increasingly deferred or avoided, we chose the harder, costlier, and riskier path of **partnership with the City**.

The Reality of the Property

Originally built in 1907, 524 Vallejo Street was historically configured and legally recognized as a two-unit residential property, consistent with early City records. Those two units are the only dwelling units that were ever lawfully established at the property prior to redevelopment.

For **nearly the past decade**, the property has existed and functioned as a **single-family home**. Its architecture, layout, and daily use have been consistent throughout that time. Marketing materials from 2017, 2021, and today show the same configuration: one home, one kitchen, one continuous living space.

During the Planning Commission hearing, additional historical facts came into the record that help explain how the current paper designation came to be. When the prior developer purchased the building, **three individuals were living on-site**. Two were occupying the **original, lawful dwelling units**. The third was living in a sub-100 square-foot space that had been added decades later as storage—not constructed or permitted as a legal dwelling unit.

All three tenancies were **resolved through documented buyouts** prior to redevelopment. A fourth purported “unit” referenced during the hearing was **not occupied** and, by the testimony of former occupants themselves, was **not feasibly habitable**.

During the subsequent remodel, the developer—for reasons that remain unclear—**legalized the two informal storage spaces on paper**, while simultaneously **constructing the single-family home configuration** that was later sold to the prior owners in 2017 and ultimately to us in 2021. The result was a lasting disconnect between City records and physical reality.

In short, while people occupied space at different points in time—and long before we came into possession of the home—the record does **not** support the existence of four lawful, livable housing units. What *has* existed for the past decade is a single-family home, and what persists today is a **legacy designation untethered from how the building was actually built, marketed, or lived in**.

Our proposal returns the property from its current single-family configuration to its historically lawful two-unit use, **creating one additional, real housing unit relative to today**.

Why Four Units Are Not Feasible Today

We followed the City's initial direction to explore reinstating four units. We filed plans, paid fees, and worked with experienced architects. Through that process, it became clear—under **current, active Planning Code standards**—that a four-unit configuration would not be approvable today.

Specifically:

- The lot size, envelope, and existing structure **cannot support four code-compliant units within the reinstatement requirements**
- Modern requirements for light, air, egress, accessibility, and life-safety **cannot be met without demolition-level reconstruction**
- The resulting units would be **substandard**, directly conflicting with the City's own livability and safety policies
- Reinstating four units would **require the displacement of our family**, as meeting current code would necessitate inserting kitchens and unit infrastructure into existing living areas, eliminating the ability for the home to function as a family residence

The Planning Staff Report itself acknowledges that the building **cannot reasonably accommodate four units due to lot size**. In addition, after **four years of working through the reinstatement process** with the Planning Department, it remains unclear what a code-compliant four-unit configuration would even entail under today's standards.

What We Are Proposing

A **proportional, accountable resolution** grounded in facts and aligned with City policy:

- Legalize the building as **two conforming units**, consistent with its historical condition
- **Add one new, high-quality rental unit**, creating net new housing
- Preserve something increasingly scarce in North Beach: a **family-sized home**
- Avoid wasteful reconstruction that would produce unsafe or unlivable housing

This approach adds **real housing**, improves safety and livability, and corrects a historical error without rewarding bad actors.

Why This Matters

Housing policy must be firm—but also factual. Applied mechanically, without regard for reality, it can unintentionally harm the very people it was designed to protect, while failing to advance affordability or supply.

We are not the developers these rules were written to stop. We are real people who live in this neighborhood. We inherited this issue, worked transparently with the City, and took the harder path in pursuit of a responsible outcome that benefits the broader community.

Our Commitment

We are long-time North Beach residents, active neighbors, and consistent supporters of local schools, community organizations, and nonprofits. We are here as **partners, not adversaries**, asking for a solution that is honest about the facts and aligned with San Francisco's housing goals.

Thank you for your time, your consideration, and your service to the city we love so very much.

— *Katelin Holloway & Ben Ramirez*
