



October 24, 2014

Ms. Angela Calvillo, Clerk
Honorable Mayor Lurie
City and County of San Francisco
City Hall, Room 244
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102

Re: **Transmittal of Planning Department Case Numbers 2025-004733PCA, 2025-004734PCA, 2025-004737PCA and 2025-004740PCA: Permit SF Planning Code Amendments**
Board File Nos. 250542, 250540, 250539 and 250538

Planning Commission Recommendation:	250542: Approval with Modification 250540: Approval 250539: Approval 250538: Approval with Modification
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Dear Ms. Calvillo and Mayor Lurie,

On June 26, 2025, the Planning Commission conducted a duly noticed public hearing at a regularly scheduled meeting to consider four proposed Ordinance, introduced by Mayor Lurie, that would amend the Planning Code, and are associated with the mayor's Permit SF effort. At the hearing, the Planning Commission adopted a recommendation for approval for all four ordinances, with recommended amendments for two of the ordinances, as noted above.

The proposed amendments are not defined as a project under CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c) and 15378 because they do not result in a physical change in the environment.

Mayor Lurie, please advise the City Attorney at your earliest convenience if you wish to incorporate the changes recommended by the Commission.

Please find attached documents relating to the actions of the Commission. If you have any questions or require further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Aaron D. Starr", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Aaron D. Starr
Manager of Legislative Affairs

cc: Austin Yang, Deputy City Attorney
Guilia Gualco-Nelson, Deputy City Attorney
Robb Kapla, Deputy City Attorney
Katy Tang, Office of Small Business
John Carroll, Office of the Clerk of the Board

ATTACHMENTS :

Planning Commission Resolution
Planning Department Executive Summary



PLANNING COMMISSION

RESOLUTION NO. 21760

HEARING DATE: June 26, 2025

Project Name: Existing Awning, Sign, and Gate Amnesty Program; Design Standards for Gates, Railings, and Grillwork
Case Number: 2025-004737PCA [Board File No. 250539]
Initiated by: Mayor Lurie / Introduced May 20, 2025
Staff Contact: aaron starr, Legislative Affairs
aaron.starr@sfgov.org, 628-652-7533

RESOLUTION ADOPTING A RECOMMENDATION FOR APPROVAL OF A PROPOSED ORDINANCE THAT WOULD AMEND THE BUILDING AND PLANNING CODES TO EXTEND THE AWNING AMNESTY PROGRAM TO APPLY TO EXISTING UNPERMITTED SIGNS AND GATES; AMENDING THE PLANNING CODE TO REMOVE DESIGN STANDARDS FOR GATES, RAILINGS, AND GRILLWORK ON GROUND FLOOR STREET FRONTAGES OF NON-HISTORIC BUILDINGS IN NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL, RESIDENTIAL-COMMERCIAL, COMMERCIAL, AND MIXED-USE DISTRICTS; AFFIRMING THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT’S DETERMINATION UNDER THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT; MAKING FINDINGS OF CONSISTENCY WITH THE GENERAL PLAN, AND THE EIGHT PRIORITY POLICIES OF PLANNING CODE, SECTION 101.1; AND MAKING FINDINGS OF PUBLIC NECESSITY, CONVENIENCE, AND WELFARE UNDER PLANNING CODE, SECTION 302.

WHEREAS, on May 20, 2025, Mayor Lurie introduced a proposed Ordinance under Board of Supervisors (hereinafter “Board”) File Number 250539, which would amend the Building and Planning Codes to extend the Awning Amnesty Program to apply to existing unpermitted Signs and Gates; and amend the Planning Code to remove design standards for gates, railings, and grillwork on ground floor street frontages of non-historic buildings in Neighborhood Commercial, Residential-Commercial, Commercial, and Mixed-Use Districts; and,

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission (hereinafter “Commission”) conducted a duly noticed public hearing at a regularly scheduled meeting to consider the proposed Ordinance on June 26, 2025 and,

WHEREAS, the proposed Ordinance has been determined to be categorically exempt from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act Section 15378 and 15060(c); and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission has heard and considered the testimony presented to it at the public hearing and has further considered written materials and oral testimony presented on behalf of Department staff and other interested parties; and

WHEREAS, all pertinent documents may be found in the files of the Department, as the Custodian of Records, at 49 South Van Ness Avenue, Suite 1400, San Francisco; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission has reviewed the proposed Ordinance; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission finds from the facts presented that the public necessity, convenience, and general welfare require the proposed amendment; and

MOVED, that the Planning Commission hereby adopts a **recommendation for approval** of the proposed ordinance.

Findings

Having reviewed the materials identified in the preamble above, and having heard all testimony and arguments, this Commission finds, concludes, and determines as follows:

The Commission finds that the proposed ordinance advances multiple policy goals related to economic recovery, equitable enforcement, and neighborhood vitality. The ordinance expands the existing amnesty program to include unpermitted gates—a feature often installed by small businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic without access to technical or financial resources.

The Commission finds that by removing outdated design standards for non-historic buildings and offering a fee-free, streamlined path to legalization, the ordinance encourages compliance without imposing unnecessary burdens.

The Commission finds that the ordinance responds to longstanding racial and social equity concerns around enforcement practices in historically marginalized communities. The ordinance achieves these objectives without compromising safety or design integrity and requires no changes to implementation procedures.

General Plan Compliance

The proposed Ordinance is consistent with the following Objectives and Policies of the General Plan:

COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY ELEMENT

OBJECTIVE 2

MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE A SOUND AND DIVERSE ECONOMIC BASE AND FISCAL STRUCTURE FOR THE CITY.

Policy 2.3

Maintain a favorable social and cultural climate in the city in order to enhance its attractiveness as a firm location.

By providing an amnesty path for existing unpermitted awnings and signs—many of which support legacy and small businesses—the ordinance sustains commercial activity and contributes to neighborhood vitality. This helps preserve the city’s distinctive visual identity and its attractiveness to businesses and visitors.

Planning Code Section 101 Findings

The proposed amendments to the Planning Code are consistent with the eight Priority Policies set forth in Section 101.1(b) of the Planning Code in that:

1. That existing neighborhood-serving retail uses be preserved and enhanced and future opportunities for resident employment in and ownership of such businesses enhanced;

The proposed Ordinance would not have a negative effect on neighborhood serving retail uses and will not have a negative effect on opportunities for resident employment in and ownership of neighborhood-serving retail.

2. That existing housing and neighborhood character be conserved and protected in order to preserve the cultural and economic diversity of our neighborhoods;

The proposed Ordinance would not have a negative effect on housing or neighborhood character.

3. That the City’s supply of affordable housing be preserved and enhanced;

The proposed Ordinance would not have an adverse effect on the City’s supply of affordable housing.

4. That commuter traffic not impede MUNI transit service or overburden our streets or neighborhood parking;

The proposed Ordinance would not result in commuter traffic impeding MUNI transit service or overburdening the streets or neighborhood parking.

5. That a diverse economic base be maintained by protecting our industrial and service sectors from displacement due to commercial office development, and that future opportunities for resident employment and ownership in these sectors be enhanced;

The proposed Ordinance would not cause displacement of the industrial or service sectors due to office development, and future opportunities for resident employment or ownership in these sectors would not be impaired.

6. That the City achieve the greatest possible preparedness to protect against injury and loss of life in

an earthquake;

The proposed Ordinance would not have an adverse effect on City's preparedness against injury and loss of life in an earthquake.

7. That the landmarks and historic buildings be preserved;

The proposed Ordinance would not have an adverse effect on the City's Landmarks and historic buildings.

8. That our parks and open space and their access to sunlight and vistas be protected from development;

The proposed Ordinance would not have an adverse effect on the City's parks and open space and their access to sunlight and vistas.

Planning Code Section 302 Findings.

The Planning Commission finds from the facts presented that the public necessity, convenience and general welfare require the proposed amendments to the Planning Code as set forth in Section 302.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Commission hereby ADOPTS A RECOMMENDATION FOR APPROVAL the proposed Ordinance as described in this Resolution.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was adopted by the Commission at its meeting on June 26, 2025



Jonas P. Ionin
Commission Secretary

Jonas P Ionin

Digitally signed by Jonas P Ionin
Date: 2025.06.27 09:25:51 -07'00'

AYES: Campbell, Williams, Braun, Imperial, Moore, and So
NOES: None
ABSENT: McGarry
ADOPTED: June 26, 2025



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PLANNING CODE TEXT AMENDMENT

HEARING DATE: June 26, 2025

90-Day Deadline: August 18, 2025

Project Name: Existing Awning, Sign, and Gate Amnesty Program; Design Standards for Gates, Railings, and Grillwork
Case Number: 2025-004737PCA [Board File No. 250539]
Initiated by: Mayor Lurie / Introduced May 20, 2025
Staff Contact: Aaron Starr, Legislative Affairs
aaron.starr@sfgov.org, 628-652-7533
Environmental Review: Not a Project Under CEQA

RECOMMENDATION: Adopt of Recommendation for Approval

Planning Code Amendment

Ordinance amending the Building and Planning Codes to extend the Awning Amnesty Program to apply to existing unpermitted Signs and Gates; amending the Planning Code to remove design standards for gates, railings, and grillwork on ground floor street frontages of non-historic buildings in Neighborhood Commercial, Residential-Commercial, Commercial, and Mixed-Use Districts.

The Way It Is Now:

The Way It Would Be:

1	In Neighborhood Commercial, Residential-Commercial, Commercial, and Mixed-Use Districts, any decorative railings or grillwork placed in front of or behind ground floor windows is required to be at least 20% open to perpendicular view. Exceptions to these requirements are provided for historic buildings.	These controls would be removed for non-historic buildings.
2	Security gates are required to be open grillwork rather than solid material. Gates that are less than 75% open to perpendicular views are required to include a transparent viewing window. Gates, when both open and folded or rolled, are required to be recessed within, or laid flush with, the building facade.	These controls would be removed for non-historic buildings.
3	Cannabis Retail uses are provided and exemption that allowed full roll-down gates so long as they were only employed when not open to the public.	These controls would be deleted, as a special carveout for Cannabis Retail would no longer be needed.
4	Planning Code Section 187 provides an amnesty program for pre-existing Awnings, and Signs. The amnesty program in the Building Code covers pre-existing Awnings.	The amnesty program in the Planning Code would be expanded to include pre-existing unpermitted Gates. The amnesty program in the Building Code would be expanded to include pre-existing Signs and Gates.

Background

This Ordinance builds upon the City's prior efforts to support small businesses and promote code compliance through streamlined permitting and equitable enforcement. In 2020, in response to the economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the City adopted an Awning Amnesty Program to help businesses legalize existing unpermitted awnings. Recognizing the ongoing need for regulatory flexibility and the presence of additional unpermitted features on commercial properties, this Ordinance expands that amnesty program to include existing unpermitted signs and gates installed before August 20, 2023. It also removes outdated design standards for gates, railings, and grillwork in non-historic buildings located in commercial and mixed-use districts. These changes aim to reduce regulatory burdens, preserve the visual character of neighborhood commercial corridors, and encourage property owners to legalize existing installations while maintaining public safety and design integrity.

Issues and Considerations

Existing Amnesty Program

Established in 2023, the Awning and Sign Amnesty Ordinance was developed in response to the significant number of unpermitted signs and awnings installed throughout San Francisco. Recognizing both the economic challenges faced by these businesses and the aesthetic contributions of awnings and signs to neighborhood character, the city created a temporary program to streamline the legalization process. It offers a simplified application procedure, waives associated fees, and allows certain awnings and signs to be recognized as legal nonconforming structures under the Planning Code. The program is designed to reduce regulatory burdens and support small businesses, while maintaining safety and design standards.

Originally the program was proposed to sunset in June 2024, unless extended by the Board of Supervisors. In 2024, the Board extended the program to be permanent, with the fee waiver active until July 1, 2025. This proposed ordinance would expand the amnesty program in the Planning Code to also include security gates. The Building Code's amnesty program would be expanded to include signs and security gates.

Recent Changes to Security Gate Controls

General Plan Compliance

The proposed ordinance is consistent with the San Francisco General Plan as it supports neighborhood character, public safety, and a diverse economic base. By expanding the amnesty program to include existing, unpermitted gates—particularly those installed by small businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic—it helps maintain active ground-floor uses and supports commercial vitality, aligning with Commerce and Industry Element Policy 2.3.

Racial and Social Equity Analysis

The Awning Sign Ordinance promotes racial and social equity by reducing financial and procedural barriers that have historically and disproportionately impacted small business owners in communities of color and immigrant neighborhoods. Many of these businesses, particularly in historically underinvested corridors, have operated with minimal resources and often installed awnings, gates, or signs without permits due to a lack of access to technical assistance or affordable permitting pathways. These features—while technically unpermitted—have served essential safety, visibility, and identity functions for small businesses, especially in neighborhoods such as the Mission, Bayview-Hunters Point, Chinatown, and the Tenderloin.

By extending the existing Awning Amnesty Program to include signs and gates, waiving permitting and enforcement fees through July 1, 2025, and offering a streamlined path to legalization, the Ordinance provides an accessible compliance opportunity that does not penalize businesses for past unintentional code violations. This approach acknowledges systemic inequities in enforcement, technical literacy, and capital access, and offers corrective measures rather than punitive ones.

Additionally, the removal of rigid design standards for gates, railings, and grillwork in non-historic buildings allows for more culturally responsive and practical design choices, especially for immigrant-owned businesses that prioritize visibility and security in distinct ways. Overall, the Ordinance supports economic stability and visual presence for historically marginalized business owners, aligning with the City's equity goals and the priority policies of Planning Code Section 101.1.

Implementation

The Department has determined that this ordinance will not impact our current implementation procedures.

Recommendation

The Department recommends that the Commission ***adopt a recommendation for approval*** of the proposed Ordinance and adopt the attached Draft Resolution to that effect.

Basis for Recommendation

The Department recommends approval of the proposed ordinance because it advances multiple policy goals related to economic recovery, equitable enforcement, and neighborhood vitality. As discussed above, the ordinance expands the existing amnesty program to include unpermitted gates—a feature often installed by small businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic without access to technical or financial resources. By removing outdated design standards for non-historic buildings and offering a fee-free, streamlined path to legalization, the ordinance encourages compliance without imposing unnecessary burdens. It supports a diverse and resilient commercial base and aligns with General Plan policies that promote economic opportunity and neighborhood character. Further, the ordinance responds to longstanding racial and social equity concerns around enforcement practices in historically marginalized communities. The ordinance achieves these objectives without compromising safety or design integrity and requires no changes to implementation procedures.

Required Commission Action

The proposed Ordinance is before the Commission so that it may adopt a recommendation of approval, disapproval, or approval with modifications.

Environmental Review

The proposed amendments are not defined as a project under CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c) and 15378 because they do not result in a physical change in the environment.

Public Comment

As of the date of this report, the Planning Department has not received any public comment regarding the proposed Ordinance.

ATTACHMENTS:

Exhibit A: Draft Planning Commission Resolution
Exhibit B: Board of Supervisors File No. 250539