Union Square

Market Environment

Union Square is the most visited neighborhood in San Francisco — ever-changing, eternally celebrating and firmly rooted in its rich past. Its centerpiece, Union Square Park, was dedicated in 1850 and named after pro-Union rallies there during the United States Civil War.

Today, it remains the ceremonial “heart” of the City, serving as the site of public concerts and events, art shows, impromptu protests, and the annual Christmas tree and Menorah lighting. The area is one of the world’s premier shopping destinations with an array of luxury outposts, local and national boutiques and major department stores. It is home to the City’s theater district, grand hotels and small inns, art galleries and restaurants. Along its Powell Street Cable Car line is a pedestrian corridor that is one of the busiest in the nation used by 100,000 people on weekends.

In 1999, the Union Square Business Improvement District (BID) was formed in an effort to enhance the experience in the area and contribute to a safer, cleaner and more vibrant community. The BID was the first and largest of San Francisco’s 11 property-based business improvement districts, providing services funded by property owners who are self-assessed. These services range from a Community Ambassador program and cleaning services to marketing and advocacy. The BID’s original 10-block area was expanded in 2009 to 27 blocks with 2,980 parcels, including both public and private ownership with a vast array of retail, hospitality and residential spaces.

Challenges

- Creating support for the first special assessment district in City history — the Union Square BID.
- Generating support 10 years later among a new group of property owners, public officials, businesses and community groups to expand the BID.
- Addressing issues of panhandling, safety, traffic and cleanliness.
- Integrating the needs of a wide range of interests — City agencies, law enforcement, nonprofits groups, local business and community organizations — to support the BID’s goals of improving the area.

“MJMMG helps ensure that Union Square is a place visitors want to come and visit. They want to stay here, shop here, dine here, and spend their money here. Union Square contributes 10% of the sales tax revenue, which feeds San Francisco’s coffers and leads to the economic well-being of the city.”

Linda Mjellem | Former Executive Director | Union Square Business Improvement District
Services Delivered

Private commercial property owners contracted with MJMMG to provide overall strategic counsel on the formation of the BID and its overall structure, and ten years later to generate support for its expansion. MJMMG provides a full range of services to the BID, including the Community Service Ambassador Program, cleaning and maintenance.

Formation and Expansion of the BID

- Provided counsel on forming the BID, including community outreach, and the development of the BID’s overall structure, funding mechanisms and written legislation.

- Conducted surveys among district residents to determine issues of concern.

- Conducted comprehensive public outreach to programs involving community meetings and City hearings, one-on-one discussions and materials development to educate audiences about the BID’s merits.

- Managed the development and distribution of ballots sent to property owners voting on BID formation.

District Structure and Services

- Creation of the BID pro forma, management plan, bylaws, operations structure, job descriptions and service descriptions.

- Developed the City’s first Ambassador program. The uniformed Ambassadors assist visitors and residents with area information, support police and property owners in crime prevention, and assist the street population with finding social services.

- Implement daily services to improve its beauty, safety, cleanliness and vibrancy — coordination of the Ambassador program, daily sidewalk sweeping, graffiti removal, regular steam cleaning, trash receptacle control, painting, management staff and mediation of sanitation problems.

- Worked closely with Union Square BID, Department of Public Transportation, police and local garages to create a best practices policy for traffic management in Union Square during the holidays.

- Implemented a comprehensive outreach program to stakeholders — Uptown Parking Corporation, City Recreation and Parks Department, business owners and operators, hotels, residents, local groups that have an interest in the health, safety and vitality of the Union Square area.

Results

- MJMMG played a major role in establishing the BID in 1999.

- The BID’s renewal and expansion was approved in 2009.

- MJMMG has been the primary service provider of maintenance, cleanliness and Ambassador programs since the BID’s formation.

- MJMMG received the “Recognition Award” by the San Francisco Chief of Police for community/policy partnership for its effective handling of panhandling challenges at Union Square, MJMMG assumed management of Union Square Park in 2002, which continues today. Union Square Park is a benchmark for how public spaces can be great places.