



Figure 2: Fontana Residential Complex, San Francisco

2 Lessons from the Past

While Figure 1 shows the extent and pervasiveness of these sterile ghost town business parks in the vicinity, waterfront development is not limited to commercial and industrial users.

2.1 Preventing “Manhattanization”

One important lesson from history can be found in San Francisco. Shown in Figure 2 is the controversial Fontana Residential Complex on the North side of the city. This complex when proposed in the 1960’s almost single-handedly began a revolution against the “Manhattanization” of San Francisco.

In 1960, the planning director of San Francisco James R. McCarthy sounded the warning: *“San Francisco zoning laws will have to be changed to prevent construction of a ‘Chinese Wall’ of skyscrapers along its waterfront. We want to avoid what has happened in lower Manhattan in New York, where views of the bay are blocked by high rising buildings.”*

Former California State Assemblyman Casper Weinberger argued that the subsequent 40-foot height limit adopted in much of San Francisco *“will preserve for future generations one of the priceless assets of San Francisco, the whole relationship of the City to the Bay, and particularly, the views enjoyed by the public from publicly owned lands, such as Coit Tower and other City-owned recreational spaces.”*

In further testimony he continued, *“the Master Plan has for years provided that the height of buildings should generally follow the contour of the land, and that low rise buildings should be built on the low lands, such as the northern waterfront, and high rise at the tops of hills so that the loss of views, etc., will be minimized.”* [10]

For scale purposes, the view of Fontana in the figure above is from a distance offshore that is similar to where users of CPSRA engage in windsurfing recreation compared to some of the proposed plans for the Project.

2.2 Preservation Key to Thriving Success

No one can dispute the success that the San Francisco real estate market has enjoyed. Property values and revenues to the City are incredible. This height limit, which was fairly and uniformly applied except at the tops of some hills and certain special districts, has not prevented the City from thriving.

In almost every single “Top-10” list for things to do and see in San Francisco, the views are listed among the best of the best. Picture postcards often show these views taken on Powell Street looking North and framed by cable car. Instead of constraining the potential for the City, the height limit created incredible value for the City and kept the density from overwhelming infrastructure.

This is a tremendously relevant example of how a community applied a long-term perspective and enjoyed great success that benefited not just the City coffers but every resident and visitor.