At 5:14 A.M. on April 18, 1906, an earthquake less than one minute in duration rumbled through San Francisco, leveling buildings, rupturing gas pipes, and breaking water mains. The earthquake set the stage for disaster. Within just a few hours, local fires resulting from the broken gas pipes and overturned stoves coalesced into a major conflagration that burned unchecked for three days. Mary Austin, who like many others was forced from her home by the fire, vividly recounted the scene a few weeks later:

Before the red night paled into murky dawn thousands of people were vomited out of the angry throat of the street far down toward Market [Street]. . . . There was a strange, hot, sickish smell in the street as if it had become the hollow slot of some fiery breathing snake. I came out and stood in the pale pinkish glow and saw a man I knew hurrying down toward the gutted district . . . “Bob,” I said, “it looks like the day of Judgment!”
The fire destroyed the heart of San Francisco—almost five square miles encompassing the financial district, the major retail district, and much of the wholesale, factory, and entertainment sections of the city. Only the harbor facilities, which could be protected by streams of water from fireboats, survived in the downtown area. Burning an area one and one-half times as large as the great Chicago fire of 1871, the San Francisco fire gutted some 28,000 buildings in 521 blocks. Between 500 and 3,000 people died, and another 250,000, about three-fifths of the population, were left homeless.  

Despite its extensive destruction, San Francisco was functioning again within a remarkably short time. (The Golden Gate Tennis Club, although handicapped by courts with cracked baselines, was able to hold a tournament just three weeks after the earthquake.) With immediate recovery under way, San Franciscans faced the larger tasks of reconstruction. How would they rebuild their city? Would they reconstruct San Francisco as the city had existed before the disaster or would they rebuild it along new lines? By the destruction they caused, the earthquake and fire removed one of the main impediments to urban modernization. By destroying old structures, the disaster removed physical limitations on city development. The opportunity to build anew along planned lines was thus most pronounced in San Francisco of all of the Pacific Coast cities. Yet, despite the availability of a city plan that had been drawn up just before the earthquake and fire, San Franciscans rebuilt in a largely unplanned manner, perpetuating many of the problems from which they had long suffered.

Planning Begins in San Francisco

Efforts to improve San Francisco preceded disaster by about a decade, and business organizations led the initial campaigns. Foremost among them was the San Francisco Merchants' Association, established in 1894 by forty-seven leading merchants and bankers. From the first, members equated business development with civic progress. According to its constitution, the organization was set up "to further the best interests of San Francisco and
The 1906 earthquake and fire severely damaged San Francisco's old city hall. From the Burnham Plan for San Francisco.

thereby prove beneficial to the mercantile community." Within four years the body had 1,003 members and was working for better street cleaning, lighting, and paving, the establishment of boulevards, improved fire protection, and a free public market.³

Businessmen formed other bodies that also pressed for city betterments. In 1897 the Real Estate Dealers' Association came out for the establishment of a municipally owned water supply.⁴ By 1899 San Francisco also possessed at least thirty active neighborhood improvement clubs, composed primarily of local businessmen pledged to improving their city's streets, public buildings, sewers,
and water supply. Like members of the Merchants' Association, those belonging to the improvement clubs viewed civic and business progress as identical. As one club member observed, the improvements "will bring an era of prosperity to San Francisco."

Beyond piecemeal improvements for their city, a few San Franciscans were beginning to think in terms of broader planning. By far the most important among these was James Duvall Phelan, Jr. Phelan was a second-generation San Franciscan whose father had come to the city as a forty-niner and had quickly made a fortune in trade, real estate, and banking. Born in 1861 and educated in San Francisco, Phelan inherited and added to the family fortune as a bank president and real estate developer. His interests soon extended beyond business to encompass civic affairs. Phelan served as the vice-president of the California World's Fair Commission in 1893 and managed the state's exhibit in Chicago. Like so many who saw the "White City," with its stately buildings grouped according to an overall plan, Phelan was profoundly moved by the experience. Upon returning to San Francisco, he helped start the Mid-Winter Fair in 1894, a local continuation of the Chicago exposition.

Seeing in politics an arena in which he might leave his imprint upon San Francisco, Phelan won election as the city's mayor in 1896, 1898, and 1899. As mayor, Phelan found himself mixing politics with his desire to improve San Francisco. As a private citizen, Phelan had been the president of the San Francisco Art Association in 1894 and 1895. While he was mayor, that organization petitioned Phelan to appoint a committee to prepare a plan for the "adornment" of San Francisco. Phelan readily complied, setting up a committee of businessmen, lawyers, architects, and artists. Nothing immediately came of the effort, however.

Phelan was more successful in 1898 in winning approval for a new city charter from the electorate. Establishing a new board of supervisors elected at large (the older one had been elected by district), increasing the authority of the mayor, and giving the city the power to purchase utilities from private companies, the charter greatly strengthened the city government. The increase in power, combined with the fact that the city had the authority in most cases to issue its own bonds without prior approval from the state legislature, set the stage for more vigorous actions by city officials. During the next decade and a half, city officials—prod-
ded by businessmen—would use their bonding power to improve San Francisco (the bonds were general obligation bonds requiring a two-thirds favorable vote and paid for primarily by property taxes). By 1915, San Francisco ranked fourth among all of the cities in the United States in terms of per capita revenue receipts and outlays.

Although he was the most prominent individual to become interested in civic improvements for San Francisco, Phelan was not alone. In 1899, for example, B. J. S. Cahill, an English-born architect who had moved to San Francisco and who had submitted a plan for the new University of California campus in Berkeley, put forward a plan for the creation of a civic center in San Francisco. Cahill called for the rerouting of Market Street, the city's main commercial thoroughfare, around an island of three blocks in the downtown area and the siting of public buildings on those blocks. While nothing resulted immediately from Cahill's urgings, they, like Phelan's activities, aroused public interest in civic improvements.

By the late 1890s, San Franciscans were, then, becoming increasingly interested in civic improvements. Merchant groups, real estate bodies, local improvement associations, and some individual businessmen and professionals like Phelan and Cahill were putting forward a growing number of ideas and were becoming involved in the political process. In 1898 the San Francisco Bulletin could accurately observe that "there seems to have arisen a general enthusiasm for the beautifying of the city." Whether the general ideas could be translated into concrete proposals capable of winning voter approval would soon be seen. The first test came in the 1899 city election when San Franciscans voted on $10 million in bonds for sewer, school, park, and hospital improvements.

The bonds won strong backing from the Merchants' Association and some thirty of San Francisco's improvement clubs, joined together as the Public Improvement Central Club. Through civic improvements San Francisco could win recognition for itself and, as Andrea Sbarboro, the president of the Italian-American Bank and the head of the Public Improvement Central Club, explained, assume its proper place in the nation's urban network. "It behooves all citizens to advance San Francisco to the place to which her natural advantages entitle her," he argued. Direct economic benefits were possible. " Beautifying a city pays enormous returns on the expenditure . . . [as] demonstrated in the case
of Paris," Sbarboro noted. "In our case the proposed park system will enhance real estate values [and] as the years pass and our city is made more attractive, the increase in population and consequent improvements will reduce taxes to a minimum."\textsuperscript{15} Then, too, the bonds were needed to allow San Francisco to catch up with Oakland and Los Angeles, cities, Sbarboro observed, that "lead us in schools."\textsuperscript{16} The only organized business opposition came from the San Francisco Real Estate Association, whose members feared higher real estate taxes.

Supporters added that passage of the bonds was needed to create public works jobs for laborers, though there was far from unanimity on that point. P. H. McCarthy, the president of the city's strong Building Trades Council put forward the argument for jobs most forcefully. He was joined by James Phelan, who actively worked for the bonds. Phelan observed that "the carpenter, the brickman, the plumber, the cabinetmaker, tradesman, and laborer will be direct beneficiaries. In the grading, bridge-building, and maintenance of the new grounds, labor will find employment." Nonetheless, the San Francisco Labor Council opposed the bonds as being "for the benefit of the rich" and because "the importation of labor [to work on the city projects] would injure the workingmen already here."\textsuperscript{17}

More than economic progress and civic recognition were at stake in the minds of the bond proponents, for a quest for civic unity also inspired them. Nowhere was that clearer than in the many speeches made by Phelan. The heart and soul of the bond campaign, Phelan linked civic patriotism to civic beauty, commerce, and jobs in talk after talk. In a public appeal for bonds to pay for new land for parks and boulevards, Phelan foreshadowed many of the arguments used during the next decade in favor of city planning in San Francisco:

The people should patriotically arise to the occasion and not thwart a great public work by bickerings or lack of confidence in the future of their city. By making San Francisco beautiful and attractive the outlay will be repaid many times by increasing population, flow of visitors, and a happy contented people. Labor will get employment not only in the public works, but permanently in the demand for work which
comes to great cities when their attractions draw and hold a
clarge number of people.\textsuperscript{18}

A broadside distributed by the improvement clubs summa-
rized the diverse social and economic reasons supporters favored
the bonds: “Vote for progress and prosperity; vote for the adorn-
ment of the city; vote for health and recreation for the people; vote
for the employment of labor.”\textsuperscript{19}

The bonds won approval handily.\textsuperscript{20} At that time, most groups
could agree that substantial city improvements were needed in
San Francisco.\textsuperscript{21} Sbarboro spoke for a growing number of busi-
nessmen the day after the election when he said that “capitalists
will now feel more confident and will invest money in improving
the city . . . this will give new life to all industries and permanent
employment for many years to come to our laborers.”\textsuperscript{22} Phelan,
always interested in making San Francisco one of America’s lead-
ing cities, asserted, “By the vote of today we have taken our posi-
tion confidently among the great cities and the people have shown
a spirit that will carry them to success.”\textsuperscript{23} Phelan and Sbarboro
spoke too soon, however. The bonds were nullified on a legal tech-
nicality, and only a few improvements took place during the next
four years.

Almost the same scenario recurred in 1903, as San Franciscans
voted on bonds for hospital, sewer, school, street, library, jail, play-
ground, and park improvements. Many of the same arguments
employed in 1899 were used again. Civic pride, a desire to place
their city among the first rank of American metropolises, remained
very important to the bond supporters. Frank Symes, the presi-
dent of the San Francisco Merchants Association, decried the
state of city services as “humiliating . . . an absolute discredit to
any first-class city” and called for the passage of the bonds to
rectify the situation.\textsuperscript{24} F. W. Dohrman, one of San Francisco’s
leading merchants, argued in a similar vein that only through the
improvements made possible by the bonds could San Francisco
“step forward and take its rank and its position among the large
cities of the world.”\textsuperscript{25} Intercity rivalry led some to support
the bonds. The head of the California Club noted that Seattle pos-
sessed “the most exquisite of Western parks,” and called on San
Franciscans to vote for the bonds to make their city “ready to
meet her great destiny as a queen city.”\textsuperscript{26}
As in 1899, direct economic benefits were also seen as coming from the bonds by their supporters. Improvement clubs and the Merchants’ Association backed the bonds as “a good business proposition” because coordinated improvements would be cheaper than improvements made “piecemeal.” Moreover, it was expected that “if we make the city more delightful, more people will come here to live” and that “San Francisco, under such stimulus, will go ahead.” 27 McCarthy of the Building Trades Council again favored the bonds as likely to provide employment for construction workers, but he added, too, that “we ought to have a beautiful city in which we can all live and feel proud of it.” 28 Phelan, now a private citizen and no longer mayor, campaigned for the bonds. In addition to the arguments he had used in 1899, Phelan added the claim that improvements to San Francisco would make the city more “wholesome,” thus encouraging people “to flock here from the suburbs where they now go for health.” 29

Facing no organized opposition, the bonds once more easily won approval. However, when offered for sale in September 1904, the bonds found few takers because the interest rates had been set too low. At that point, a new civic group entered the fray: the Association for the Improvement and Adornment of San Francisco (AIASF), composed mainly of the city’s leading merchants. At a meeting with bankers, the association’s members convinced San Francisco’s financiers to purchase some of the bonds. 30

Like their counterparts across the United States, San Francisco businessmen employed an organizational approach to problem solving in the opening years of the twentieth century. Intensified labor-management conflict was eroding popular support for business-sponsored urban improvements in San Francisco, causing business leaders, especially merchants, to form their own organization explicitly devoted to bringing about civic improvements. A bitter two-month strike in 1901 pitted the merchants against the city’s powerful teamsters and waterfront workers. When Mayor Phelan intervened on behalf of the employers, he began losing labor support for, among other things, his plans for civic improvements. The strike ushered in a decade of conflict between management and labor in San Francisco. As part of the conflict, in 1901 labor leaders organized their own political party, the Union Labor party; and that party succeeded in controlling much of city politics for the next nine years. Eugene Schmitz of the Union
Labor party became mayor; and Abe “Boss” Ruef, the real power in the party, ran city politics. When the Union Labor party proved to be not only unresponsive to their wishes but also corrupt, some of San Francisco’s business elite looked for new methods by which to influence their city’s development.31

Some sought to reform their city’s politics, and from this effort may be traced the origins of progressivism in San Francisco and California.32 Fremont Older, the editor of the San Francisco Bulletin; Rudolph Spreckels, whose family had made a small fortune in sugar refining; James Phelan; and other business leaders mounted a campaign to expose corruption in the Union Labor party. In a series of investigations lasting into 1907, they ultimately proved successful. Schmitz was removed from office, and Ruef was sent to the state prison at San Quentin. From 1907 onward the reform movement in San Francisco merged with similar developments elsewhere in California to give rise to the progressive movement in the state.

At the same time that they were beginning to try to change politics in San Francisco, business leaders set up the AIASF in January 1904. A meeting of “about twenty gentlemen” called by Phelan, J. W. Byrne, the president of the Pacific Union Club, and Willis Davis, the president of the San Francisco Art Association, convened in the building of the San Francisco Merchants’ Exchange to found the association. The letter of invitation to those founding the organization stated that “The object of the meeting is to formally discuss a plan for the improvement of San Francisco” and noted that “the plan contemplates making San Francisco a more desirable city in which to live.”33 Phelan, who was the most important figure in the formation of the group, appealed to the civic pride of San Franciscans. “San Francisco is at a turning point of its growth,” he observed. The city could either become a world leader or fall to second-class status. “It can either be a great and beautiful and attractive city where men and women of civilized tastes and wants will desire to live, or a great and ugly and forbidding city which people will shun.”34

Composed mainly of members of San Francisco’s merchant and banking elite (including the president of the Merchants’ Association and the head of the Merchants’ Exchange), the AIASF grew rapidly, attaining 377 members within a year.35 Those joining the AIASF had in mind a multitude of individual civic improvements: the construction of an opera house, auditorium, and music conser-
atory, street and boulevard improvements, the creation of terraced parks, and other projects. From the outset, however, the AIASF’s overriding concern was the preparation of a “comprehensive plan” for San Francisco as a means of achieving an “elevation of the public taste” and as a “great advertisement for our city.” In an open letter to the general public in late April 1904, the directors of the AIASF summed up its goals, which, like those of the Merchants’ Association put forward a decade earlier, blended civic pride, business growth, and urban development:

The main objects of the Association are to promote in every practical way the beautifying of streets, public buildings, parks, squares, and places of San Francisco; to bring to the attention of the officials and people of the city the best methods for instituting artistic municipal improvements; to stimulate the sentiment of civic pride in the improvement and care of private property; to suggest quasi-public enterprises and, in short, make San Francisco a more agreeable city in which to live.

Elected president of the AIASF, Phelan moved quickly to make those ideas reality. Even before the association had been founded, Phelan had sounded out Daniel Burnham, America’s best-known urban planner, about the possibility of coming to San Francisco to prepare a city plan. Burnham had been in overall charge of designing the architecture of the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, had headed the commission to draw up a plan for Washington, D.C., in 1901 and 1902, and had been involved in planning the layout for new government buildings in Cleveland in 1902 and 1903. In early February 1904, the AIASF extended an invitation to Burnham. Burnham accepted with alacrity on the conditions that the association would pay his expenses and that he would be able to name his subordinates. Those conditions were met, and Burnham came to San Francisco in late spring, bringing with him his talented young assistant Edward Bennett. (This was Bennett’s first, but not his last, experience with western cities. He would go on to design a city plan for Portland.) Welcoming Burnham to San Francisco at a dinner at the St. Francis Hotel in early May, Phelan caught the feeling of optimism of the day in observing that “a new

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spirit has taken hold of San Francisco to make San Francisco liveable and loveable—to make it worthy of its position and destiny,” and the members of the AIASF endorsed a resolution calling upon Burnham “to draft a plan for the improvement and advancement of San Francisco.”

Burnham and Bennett, assisted by the San Francisco architect Willis Polk, set up a studio atop the Twin Peaks from which they could view the city; and from that perch they labored throughout 1904 and 1905 to draft a city plan for San Francisco. Burnham was away much of the time drawing up plans for a redesigned Manila and a new summer capital for the Philippines at Baguio. As a consequence, much of the work devolved upon Bennett, Polk, and others. As promised, the AIASF paid for the work, the cost of which came to sixteen thousand dollars, assisted by large donations from Phelan, Spreckels, the Southern Pacific Railroad, the United Railroads of San Francisco (the city’s private street railroad system), the San Francisco Lumber Dealers’ Exchange, the San Francisco Gas and Electric Company, the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, the Brewers’ Protective Association, the Emporium (the city’s major department store), and several leading merchants.

The arrival of Burnham spurred the AIASF on to new efforts. The organization set up an advisory council to meet on a regular basis with Burnham and his assistants and arranged hearings at which representatives of business bodies, improvement clubs, and some labor groups presented ideas as the work progressed. The AIASF also continued its own efforts to improve San Francisco, mounting campaigns for the planting of flowers and trees, the extension of parks, the building of better streets, the prohibition of overhead trolley-car wires on Sutter and Market streets as not befitting “the dignity and beauty of our principal streets,” and the construction of harbor improvements made “necessary by the growth of commerce and the increasing population” of San Francisco.

The Burnham Plan

Completed late in the summer of 1905, the Burnham Plan for San Francisco set a pattern to be repeated in city plans prepared
throughout America during the Progressive Era in aiming at making radical changes in the physical layout of San Francisco. "We must remember that a meager plan will fall short of perfect achievement, while a great one will yield large results," Burnham trumpeted. While visionary in his scope, Burnham could, nonetheless, be practical in how he thought his plan should be implemented. "It is not to be supposed that all the work indicated can or should be carried out at once," he wrote. Rather, he thought, "a plan beautiful and comprehensive enough for San Francisco can only be executed by degrees."\(^{45}\)

Influenced by his study of Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Moscow, and London, Burnham thought that a city should be laid out in series of concentric circles, with each circle having a different role in the life of the city. "The city may be divided into the following elements: 1st—Administrative and Educational; 2nd—Economical; 3rd—Residential," Burnham explained. The first "element," that is, the administrative and educational center, would be, he thought, "the real being of the city proper . . . it guarantees the city's relation to the country and its civic character to the citizens."\(^{46}\) Beyond the first zone would be a second area for business and commercial purposes and a third one for homes.

Replanning San Francisco's street system occupied much of the Burnham Plan, for Burnham believed that wide streets circling cities should clearly delineate the various zones of activity in them. Joining the concentric streets would be arterials slicing diagonally through the city. In putting his ideas into practice in San Francisco, Burnham had to modify them to take account of the city's hilly topography. No single web of concentric streets and arterials was possible. Instead, Burnham proposed multiple sets of street webs radiating outward from a number of centers within San Francisco. Only two streets, a Perimeter of Distribution and an Outer Boulevard, completely circled San Francisco in Burnham's plan. Beyond those grand designs, numerous proposals to relocate individual streets were laid out in the Burnham Plan. Burnham thus sought to modify greatly San Francisco's existing gridiron street plan.\(^{47}\)

Burnham also called for the construction of a civic center composed of governmental and educational buildings arranged in such a way as to contribute to "public rest and recreation and adapted to celebrations, fetes, etc."\(^{48}\) Cahill, the architect who
Daniel Burnham's proposed civic center, viewed from the south side of Market Street. From the Burnham Plan for San Francisco.

had drafted a plan for a civic center in 1899, anticipated the inclusion of a civic center in the Burnham Plan. He reworked his plan, moving the civic center off Market Street to a plaza to the west, and presented it to Burnham and Bennett for their consideration. Burnham and Bennett, however, rejected Cahill's proposal, favoring a civic center consisting of a ring of buildings located at the intersection of Market Street and Van Ness Avenue a number of blocks south of the major downtown area.49 At various points throughout the city there would also be smaller public "places" removed "from the direct flow and press of business" and designed "to strengthen the public sense of the dignity and responsibility of citizenship."50

Parks and boulevards attracted Burnham's attention, as they
did that of most city planners in the Progressive Era. Burnham suggested the creation of large parks, smaller playgrounds, and parkways throughout San Francisco. They would, he argued, serve the practical purpose of acting as “an effective barrier” to the spread of fires. Moreover, parks would, he believed, instill desirable moral values in those who frequented them. In calling for a formal layout in the parks, Burnham noted that “in the smaller parks this amounts to a lesson of order and system, and its influence on the masses cannot be overestimated.” Similarly, he hoped that public meetings in playgrounds would “replace the old neighborhood stagnation with . . . unity of purpose and development.”

Burnham shared the belief common in the Progressive period that the character of people could be altered by changing the environments within which they lived. Parks could be a major tool in that process.

Burnham envisaged the development of an orderly San Francisco united by a sense of civic patriotism, a city whose different parts and people would all function together harmoniously. While a major advance in city planning for its day and while addressing real problems San Franciscans faced, the Burnham Plan, nonetheless, left much unsaid. Although recognizing that a city was composed of different “elements,” Burnham spent most of his plan discussing streets and parks. While some of San Francisco’s merchants were beginning to worry about the erosion of their city’s hegemony over the Pacific Coast, the Burnham Plan did not adequately address their concerns. Housing, the harbor, and the economy of San Francisco received scant attention. Like most city beautiful plans of the Progressive Era, the Burnham Plan dealt incompletely with the economic life of the metropolis for which it was designed. Those deficiencies, while not fully recognized in 1905, would cause problems for planning proponents later on.

San Francisco and the Origins of City Beautiful

With the preparation of the Burnham Plan, San Franciscans, despite the plan’s shortcomings, assumed a position of leadership
in the city planning movement emerging in early twentieth-century America. Americans generally were rediscovering the city and across much of the nation were reacting to the problems they found by advocating city planning. Like most Americans of the Progressive Era, those involved in the planning movement were optimistic about the future of cities.

The nascent planning movement had diverse roots. Some planning proponents took their inspiration from Chicago's Columbian Exposition of 1893 and the replanning of Washington, D.C., about a decade later. Burnham and Phelan clearly fit into that group. Others came to support planning as a result of their work as city engineers laying out street and sewer systems. While that approach to planning would be important in some other Pacific Coast cities—Seattle, for example—it was of less significance in San Francisco. Still other planning advocates began their efforts in local grass roots projects involving neighborhood improvement associations pushing for municipal art, civic improvements of various sorts, and outdoor art. That approach to planning was of considerable significance in San Francisco, as revealed in the 1899 and 1903 bond campaigns.52

Urban improvements were not new to America in the Progressive Era. From the time of the building of the first North American cities in the colonial period, some people had worked to make their urban environments better places in which to live. Parks, boulevards, civic buildings and so on had all been parts of those early improvement efforts.53 What was new, at least for most of those involved in the Progressive-Era planning movements, was what they viewed as comprehensive planning; the notion that all of the various individual aspects of improvements should be coordinated to reinforce each other. Planning proponents came increasingly to think that cities should be developed along lines laid down by overall city plans. As the historian William Wilson has observed in his study of the city beautiful movement in five cities across America, "Its development of the comprehensive plan marked the City Beautiful era's great departure from the past."54 As in the case of San Francisco, however, those plans rarely considered all of the needs of the residents of America's cities. Too often the plans were concerned too much with the sticks and stones of planning, the needs of the cities, and not enough with the social needs of their citizens. As Wilson has noted, "housing
details were outside of the purview of the comprehensive planning of the era."

San Francisco businessmen, like their counterparts elsewhere, were generally optimistic about the prospect of remaking their city. They sensed that man could control his environment, that almost anything could be accomplished. A beautiful planned city would, they thought, lessen discord among different groups and help their cities capture the national reknown they deserved. There was as well a more pessimistic underside to the feelings of San Franciscans, especially some merchants, about their city's destiny. Observing the rise of other Pacific Coast metropolises, they feared for their city's future and saw in planning a way to keep their city abreast of developments occurring elsewhere on the Pacific Coast. A relatively minor note in 1905, their concern would swell to become a mighty chorus as time progressed.

Reconstruction and City Planning

Calling Burnham's work "complete and satisfactory," the AIASF presented the Burnham Plan to the city government in September 1905 and sought immediate actions on park extensions, the construction of a boulevard around San Francisco, and changes in Market Street. Accepting the plan on behalf of the city, Mayor Schmitz said that the plans gave him "the greatest pleasure" and that he believed in "beginning the work as soon as possible." The Board of Supervisors soon had the Burnham Plan printed as a public document and in mid-April copies were delivered to city hall. By the time of the earthquake and fire, Burnham's ideas were well known. City newspapers had published numerous accounts of his plans for San Francisco, and a display to publicize the plan had been mounted at city hall. 56

Divisions already existed, however, that would hinder the implementation of the plan. The rift between labor and management, widened by the 1901 strike and subsequent events, continued to grow. The division manifested itself in politics. By this time the graft trials of Schmitz and Ruef were about to begin. Businessmen like Phelan and Spreckels, who were becoming
deeply involved in the collection of evidence and legal prosecution of the leaders of the Union Labor party, were unwilling to entrust the planning of their city to the politicians in power.

At this point—in mid-April 1906—the earthquake and fire destroyed much of San Francisco. Far from ending discussion on the Burnham Plan and the future development of San Francisco, the disaster heightened it. Building on their previous experiences, some San Franciscans called for intensified improvement efforts. The Burnham Plan and the future of San Francisco were much in the news in the months following the fire and earthquake.

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, many San Franciscans were brimming with confidence that their city could be rebuilt along the lines of the Burnham Plan.57 “Do away with all square blocks and stiff straight lines, and adopt curves, the lines of beauty,” the superintendent of the Mountain View Cemetery wrote Phelan one week after the fire had died. “Now at the birth of the city it can be done.”58 Charles Lathrop, the rector of the Church of the Advent and a planning advocate, similarly wrote Phelan a few days later that he hoped the Burnham Plan would be followed in the “marvelous and unique opportunity” to rebuild in a way to ensure not only “the enriching of this city” but also “the bringing up of future generations with blue sky and fields and out of doors to keep people healthy and normal in their ideals.”59

Organizations responded optimistically to the challenge of rebuilding, capturing in the proclamations of their members some of the same connections between civic pride and economic growth that had characterized the statements of bond supporters in 1899 and 1903. On May 4, the San Francisco Real Estate Board passed a resolution predicting that San Francisco would rise from her ashes “greater, more beautiful and more prosperous,” well able “to take a still higher rank among the great cities of the world.”60 The president of the San Francisco Merchants’ Exchange made the same point, asserting that “a city is more than a mere collection of houses and humanity. It is an organism . . . [that] can not be destroyed by the mere destruction of part of its physical environment.”61 Similarly, the Outdoor Art League stressed the motto “San Francisco—today in ashes, tomorrow the city beautiful. Watch her grow.”62

Phelan, who remained at the center of San Francisco’s planning movement, was initially confident about his city’s future. “San
Francisco’s calamity will enable us now to proceed to rebuild the city on the lines of the Burnham Plan,” he wrote on April 30, and in early May he could still predict that “the new San Francisco will be finer and greater in every respect.” By July, however, Phelan was becoming uncertain about how San Francisco would be rebuilt. “Of course there is sentiment here that resumption of business is the first consideration and an indisposition to make changes that will cost money,” he observed in a letter to Andrew Crawford of the American Civic Association.63 As the course of events would soon show, Phelan’s growing reservations were well deserved.

Even as the fire raged across San Francisco, relief activities began. On the afternoon of April 18, Mayor Schmitz convened the Citizens’ Committee of Fifty, composed mainly of San Francisco’s business leaders, to provide food, clothing, and shelter for the homeless. Phelan headed the subcommittee on finance. The work of the committee was effective, and San Francisco, with its business and political leadership intact, avoided the social disruption that has sometimes characterized cities after disasters.64

In early May, a new group—the Committee of Forty, also called the Committee of Reconstruction—replaced the Committee of Fifty. The Committee of Reconstruction was to draft a plan for the rebuilding of San Francisco and report it to the city’s Board of Supervisors for implementation. Although composed mainly of business leaders and professionals, the Committee of Reconstruction also included the presidents of the San Francisco Labor Council, the Building Trades Council, and the Carpenters’ Union. Phelan chaired two subcommittees, that on boulevards and general beautification (on which he was joined by Spreckels) and that on the Burnham Plan. San Franciscans thus looked beyond their formal system of government for plans and ideas to rebuild their city. An informal government by committee developed to plan for the future of San Francisco.65

Optimism initially prevailed in the meetings of the Committee on Reconstruction and its subcommittees. A feeling existed that through planned reconstruction San Francisco could retain, and perhaps even bolster, its position on the Pacific Coast and in the United States. The chairman of the subcommittee on street widening claimed on May 9 that “San Francisco now resembles Paris more than any city in the world,” and observed that “ours now are like the chances of youth, which never come again.”66
Three weeks later, at a joint meeting of the subcommittee on streets with that on the Burnham Plan, the head of the University of California declared that San Francisco was destined to become “vastly bigger and better than ever before.” Nevertheless, he warned that “to inspire the confidence of the world and the large financial interests that are expected to play an important part in the upbuilding of the city there should be no deferring of the broad plan.”

Acrimony soon crept into the committee deliberations, however, as conflict separated those favoring rapid rebuilding with a minimum of planning as the best way to get San Francisco back on its feet from those desiring more comprehensive planning as better for San Francisco in the long run, even if that meant slowing the process of reconstruction a bit. An editorial in the Architectural Record, a national journal, summarized the difficult choice facing San Franciscans. “The conflagration, deplorable as it was, offers San Franciscans a chance to improve the lay out of the city at a much smaller expense than would formerly have been required,” observed the editor. The editorial concluded that planned rebuilding might be difficult, however, because “it is possible that the city may not be able to afford such expenditures just now and that it will have to be rebuilt along the old lines.” The issue found businessmen on both sides of the matter. Three specific disputes were especially divisive.

Street reconstruction proved to be a particularly contentious issue, for until the locations of streets were fixed and the streets rebuilt, businesses could not fully resume operations. Merchants and other businessmen who had long supported planning now broke from it in the interest of getting back in business as soon as possible. At one point, for instance, the president of the Merchants’ Association, who was also a member of the AIASF (which continued to support comprehensive planning), petitioned the subcommittee on finance to speed up approval for street rebuilding in the downtown area, even if that meant proceeding in a make-shift manner.

Another divisive matter was the proposed extension of new, strict ordinances governing the building of fireproof structures in the downtown district to new areas in an attempt to make San Francisco more secure against future blazes. The attempt led to vociferous opposition from small-business owners outside the
downtown fire limits as too expensive and as “a land-grabbing scheme on the part of the big capitalists.” It would be better to have “a city that might burn than no city at all,” argued one small retailer worried about the cost of rebuilding.⁷⁰

A third issue that immediately surfaced was that of the building of a civic center. Just one week after the earthquake and fire, Phelan issued a call to “all interested architects, engineers, and others” to come together to discuss the rebuilding of the city at a meeting of the AIASF. In May the association resolved that a new civic center should be constructed at Market and Van Ness, as specified in the Burnham Plan, and urged the Board of Supervisors to purchase the necessary four and one-half blocks there. Some businessmen countered, however, that San Francisco could not afford the expense of such a luxury at that time.⁷¹

Overarching all of those individual issues was, as the editor of the Architectural Record foresaw, a common fear on the part of many businessmen that with their property destroyed they could not afford the higher taxes they thought would be required by the improvements mandated by planning. An editorial in the San Francisco Chronicle three weeks after the earthquake caught that feeling well:

Every individual in the city is practicing economy. So must the city itself. . . . Capital will not come here either on loan or for purchase if confronted with the prospect of excessive taxation. There must be the strictest economy in government. There must be the strictest economy in improvements. We all desire the city beautiful just as we desire the home beautiful, but the business man who at this juncture should attempt to borrow money to decorate his home would knock in vain at the doors of any bank in America.⁷²

Politics further muddied the waters, making agreements on rebuilding still more difficult. By 1906 and 1907, graft prosecutions of Union Labor party leaders were under way.⁷³ Even as the prosecutions were first contemplated and then begun, the boss of the party, Abe Ruef, sought to take advantage of San Francisco’s disaster by enriching himself through real estate dealings involving political manipulations. Ruef’s actions further widened the
gap between business and labor and made business leaders still more reluctant to entrust the rebuilding of their city to the politicians in power. In late 1906 and early 1907, the Merchants' Association, which continued to back rebuilding along the lines of the Burnham Plan, called for a "thorough moral regeneration" of San Francisco's politics and attacked grafters as "traitors" to their city.74 By the spring of 1907, the organization's president was at one and the same time calling for the creation of "the San Francisco Beautiful," praising Spreckels for his work in fighting graft, and noting that in times gone past corrupt politicians were "instantly shot."75

With San Francisco's business leaders divided and with rifts between labor leaders and businessmen widening, the concept of comprehensive, coordinated planning was lost in the reality of piecemeal rebuilding. The Committee on Reconstruction recommended numerous individual street, park, and building improvements to the city government, and many of them were adopted. However, no real effort was made to follow the Burnham Plan in the reconstruction of San Francisco. Summoned back to San Francisco to offer advice on reconstruction, Burnham lamented at one point that the report of the Committee on Reconstruction had nothing to do with his plan but was designed simply to relieve the congestion of the downtown area.76 The plan could have been followed. Through newspaper coverage it was well known by this time, and it was detailed enough in its recommendations to have provided close guidance in the reconstruction of the city.

Particularly disappointing to planning proponents was a failure to rebuild the industrial and commercial area south of Market Street along new lines suggested by Marsden Manson, a former city engineer, in a detailed report submitted to the Committee on Reconstruction in September 1906. Calling for new street layouts, better fire-fighting facilities, and the regrading of hills, the report would have adapted the Burnham Plan to a major renovation of the South of Market District. "Five or ten years from now it will be absolutely impossible to make these improvements," Manson argued. "They must be made now or they will never be made. . . . I earnestly recommend these improvements so that San Francisco may at least stand ready to hold her commercial supremacy on the Pacific Coast."77 Nonetheless, in their haste to rebuild, San Franciscans largely ignored his report.

While eliminating physical limitations on urban development,
the earthquake and fire left political and social impediments intact. Although not apparent in the first burst of relief and recovery activities, political and social divisions surfaced when San Franciscans turned to the issue of long-range reconstruction. Divisions separating different groups within San Francisco made comprehensive planning impossible to achieve. As Thomas Maggee, the head of the Merchants’ Association and a strong supporter of the Burnham Plan, lamented, “Men are mostly moved by selfish interests. . . . I thought after the fire that at last San Francisco was going to pull together. For a few weeks it appeared that way, but I must confess that today we seem to be splitting apart wider than ever. What is going to pull us together?”
Private and Public Planning,

1907–1912

Nonetheless, a desire for urban improvements persisted. Throughout 1907 and 1908, San Franciscans labored through a growing number of neighborhood improvement associations for street improvements, better lighting, and the creation of neighborhood parks—all deemed necessary for comfortable urban life, and all seen as needed to stay abreast of what other Pacific Coast cities were doing. Moreover, San Franciscans supported what they viewed as essential, practical citywide services. They hesitated, however, at more grandiose proposals and never returned fully to the idea of comprehensive planning embodied in the Burnham Plan.

In 1908 San Franciscans approved $18 million worth of bonds for their water supply, sewer system, hospitals, hall of justice and jail, schools, and garbage collection system. Solidly supported by the Chamber of Commerce, the Merchants' Association, and the Board of Trade, the bonds won the backing of San Francisco's business and political leaders (by this time the Union Labor party and Mayor Schmitz were being ousted from power) as a matter of civic pride. "It comes down to a question of whether San Francisco shall admit its impotence or whether it shall rise and be the great city it can," observed one supporter. The San Francisco Chronicle editorialized in a similar fashion. "Shall this city become known as utterly incorrigible?" the paper asked. "Is there nothing on earth on which its inhabitants can agree?" The bond issue received a mixed reception from labor groups, some of whose members feared higher taxes. While the District Council of Carpenters backed them, the Labor Council, divided, took no official stand, and the Building Trades Council opposed them. Like the bond issues of five years before, the 1908 measures passed by overwhelming majorities in all parts of San Francisco.

Despite the bond victories, San Franciscans continued to oppose matters they deemed less crucial to their city's reconstruction, as revealed in a contest over bonds to build a new civic center a year later. San Francisco's city hall had been heavily damaged
by the earthquake and fire and was unusable. The city razed the structure and in 1909 proposed replacing it with a new city hall sited as specified in the Burnham Plan at Market and Van Ness. Buildings to be put up later—a library, public auditorium, and others—would complete the civic center. An $8.48 million bond issue was to pay for the city hall-civic center complex.83

Proponents of planning viewed the bond issue as a chance to rescue part of the Burnham Plan. Groups long supporting planning, such as the Merchants’ Association and the AIASF, campaigned strongly for the bonds. They were joined by newer city-wide bodies like the San Francisco Art Institute and by business groups that stood to gain the most, such as the Down Town Association and the Mission Promotion Association.84 Those favoring the bonds discerned a positive link between art and commerce. They saw in a beautiful planned city a way to put San Francisco ahead of its urban rivals, and they viewed passage of the bonds as a way to win national recognition for their city. Phelan, still active in civic affairs, called the bonds a “necessity,” if San Francisco was to be a leading American metropolis; and a pamphlet issued by the AIASF claimed that a well-constructed city hall would serve as a model to “encourage private enterprise and give employment to our people.”85 Temporarily called back to San Francisco by the AIASF to work for the bonds, Burnham argued that the civic center would “attract attention to San Francisco from all corners of the globe.” Moreover, it would “make of itself a magnet attracting from every quarter those men and fortunes which bring lasting prosperity to a great commercial center.”86 Willis Polk, the San Francisco architect who had assisted Burnham and Bennett and who was a leading member of the AIASF, may have best explained what the bonds meant to their supporters when he spoke to an appreciative audience at a meeting of the Merchants’ Association:

In the days of Pericles, when Athens was at the zenith of her commercial prosperity and had just commenced to feel the rivalry and competition of Syracuse, Pericles cast about for some method by which Athens could retain her commercial supremacy. Finally, merely as a matter of statesmanship, they decided to make Athens beautiful; not for any inherent love of beauty itself, but purely and simply as a business
proposition. . . . If Pericles as a matter of statesmanship did what he did for Athens, don’t you think it is up to San Francisco to develop a little statesmanship? 287

Despite such appeals, opposition quickly developed to the bonds. Many San Franciscans agreed with a speaker addressing the Commonwealth Club, a body composed of businessmen and professionals, who noted that voters had approved $18 million in bonds the year before and therefore could not afford the “frillery and frumpery” of a new city hall. 88 Moreover, as San Francisco recovered from the earthquake and fire and began expanding outward again, numerous local improvement clubs representing suburban neighborhoods opposed the bonds because their members, mainly businessmen, could see no immediate benefits flowing to their localities from the building of the city hall. They were more interested in the extension of city services—water, sewers, police and fire protection—into their neighborhoods. “Why should our taxes be increased for a civic center we don’t want when the city has no money to help us out in this district?” asked the president of the Bay View and Visitacion Valley Improvement Club. 89 “When we have no bread,” wondered the head of another neighborhood association, “why should we go into debt for pie?” 90

Faced with widespread opposition, the bonds failed to win approval. Although a majority of voters—12,804 to 10,504— favored them, the bonds fell short of the necessary two-thirds majority. It was the strongly negative votes of the city’s outlying suburban residence districts that killed the issue. 91

With the failure of the city hall-civic center bonds, improvement and planning efforts temporarily shifted to small-scale private projects. For those who could afford to live in them, beautifully laid-out suburbs influenced by British garden city work—Miguel Rancho, Ingleside, and St. Francis Wood—beckoned. Urban rivalry played a role in the planning of those divisions. “San Francisco’s outlying residence districts,” noted the newsletter of the Merchants’ Association in 1911, should be designed to have “the winsome beauty and strong attractiveness of suburbs across the bay and the towns of Southern California.” 92 Using both private covenants and city ordinances, real estate community builders sought to create planned enclaves within or just outside of San
Francisco. Similarly, neighborhood improvement efforts in such realms as street lighting and street repairs continued.  

From their neighborhood efforts, San Franciscans soon found themselves returning to citywide projects. Preparations for the growth expected to occur in their city with the opening of the Panama Canal, readying their city for visitors attending the Panama–Pacific International Exposition, and changes in city politics all lured San Franciscans to once again enter the realm of city-wide planning. This return was, nonetheless, less concerned with comprehensive planning than the campaign for the Burnham Plan had been. Although calling for improvements throughout all of San Francisco, it was more limited in the scope and range of its proposals than had been the Burnham Plan. Ultimately, the new campaign came to focus mainly on building a new civic center and on cleaning up San Francisco for the world’s fair. Largely gone was the idea of the coordinated construction of a civic center, parks, boulevards, and streets.  

The coming completion of the Panama Canal spurred San Franciscans to reconsider the need for civic improvements. Businessmen in particular wanted to be ready to benefit from what they thought would be a tremendous increase in trade, business, and immigration and were eager to make urban improvements. Merchants, especially, viewed the canal as their salvation in the growing commercial rivalry their city was encountering from other Pacific Coast metropolises. They never tired of pointing out that their community lay astride the shortest circle route through the canal to the Orient and fervently believed that the canal would secure “the permanent installation of San Francisco as a great center of world commerce on the Pacific Ocean.”  

Business and political leaders realized, however, that the canal would not automatically benefit their city, for other Pacific Coast cities were also getting ready for its opening. As one merchant warned, “Portland, like Seattle, is thoroughly awake to the possibilities of a tremendous increase in business and population following the completion of the Panama canal and is bending every energy in preparing herself for that event. . . . Portland may well be classed as a rival of San Francisco.” The message was clear: San Franciscans must also take steps to prepare their city for future growth. One of the city supervisors made that point at the dinner at which a new Chamber of Commerce was formed (in late 1911
the Chamber absorbed the Merchants’ Exchange, the Merchants’ Association, and the Down Town Association). Noting that the canal would increase trade and manufacturing in San Francisco, he observed that those benefits would materialize only if the city’s residents got ready for them through city planning. “Broader streets and brighter parks, a great civic center . . . a new city hall” were needed, he exhorted. Moreover, he thought, “Our hills must be tunnelled to open up new districts to the home seeker.”96 The president of the Chamber of Commerce made many of the same points in his inaugural address in early 1913. Referring to the completion of the canal, he observed that “no American city has ever confronted a period like this. What these years will bring forth depends upon what we do now.” He then proceeded to urge chamber members to support city improvements of all types.97

The most immediate result of this concern was the boring of a tunnel through the Twin Peaks to open a vast new area to residential development in western San Francisco. The Merchants’ Association and some fifty local improvement clubs pushed for the tunnel as a way to prepare their city for “the floodgates of prosperity” they expected to materialize with the opening of the Panama Canal. Unless the tunnel were built, an officer of the Merchant’s Association warned, San Francisco would be “outstripped by the smaller cities of the coast.”98 Civic pride was involved. As one San Francisco newspaper observed, “When Seattle finds a hill in her way, she washes it down. Under the same conditions Los Angeles tunnels the hills. . . . What are the people of the earth going to think of us, when they come trooping through the Panama Canal?” He concluded, “We’d better go about a little, take a few lessons in civic pride and patriotism from our sister cities on the coast and then get busy.”99 Only then could San Francisco remain a leading city on the Pacific Coast and in the nation. The city government approved the project in 1912, and work on it began two years later.

The second event igniting interest in citywide improvements was the Panama–Pacific International Exposition. In 1911 San Francisco defeated New Orleans for the right to sponsor this world’s fair, due to open its doors in 1915. San Francisco’s business leaders quickly came to see the exposition as a chance to show the world how fully their city had recovered from the earthquake and fire. The exposition would, they thought, place their city back on
the map. There had already been two forerunners to this exposition. The Portola Festival of 1909 attracted 300,000 visitors to San Francisco and, according to the Merchants' Association, gave the city "the greatest 'ad' it has ever enjoyed."100 Four years later, the Balboan Exposition provided a further boost.

Even greater results were expected from the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. Warren Manley of the Chamber of Commerce praised it as "a golden opportunity . . . that will undoubtedly never occur again."101 A desire for civic unity, as well as material progress, motivated some working for the exposition. As early as 1910, the house organ of the Merchants' Association editorialized with approval about preparations for the world's fair, "If eloquence can bury the hatchet, that overworked implement of civic strife and faction is by this time rusting to uselessness in its unmarked grave."102 Nonetheless, as in the case of the Panama Canal, it was recognized that public improvements would have to be made to prepare their city for the fair. As the head of the San Francisco Real Estate Board explained in late 1911, "The eyes of the world are now and will for the next several years be upon San Francisco. Prospective real estate investors the world over are looking toward San Francisco and California for investment. . . . Let us prepare for our guests by cleaning house."103 Or, as another San Franciscan noted, "We have invited the world here for 1915. . . . They must not make their way through streets like those of some smoky factory town."104

The third change was political. In the 1911 city elections, the Union Labor party was thoroughly ousted from office when James "Sunny Jim" Rolph won the first of five terms as mayor. A banker and shipowner who, nonetheless, had the respect and support of many of San Francisco's workers, Rolph campaigned as a "mayor of all the people, employee as well as employer" and called upon San Franciscans to rise above factionalism. As mayor, he worked hard to unite his city's different groups and restore public confidence in city government. His administration did much to heal the political divisions in San Francisco and thus helped create a political environment within which some city planning efforts could be revived.105

Lending structure to the renewed citywide planning campaign was the Civic League of Improvement Clubs. Formed one month after the earthquake and fire to help with the tasks of immediate
recovery, the Civic League soon broadened its work. By 1911 the Civic League was composed of delegates from sixty-seven improvement clubs boasting an aggregate membership of eight thousand. The organization hoped to create “a new, clean city, business prosperity, industrial peace, increased commerce, and a pull together to build up San Francisco.”

The City Beautiful, the Civic Center, and the Exposition

In 1912 the Civic League led a campaign to beautify San Francisco by dividing the city into twelve districts and presenting prizes to the areas that sponsored the most improvements. Beauty and profits, it was thought, could and should coexist in this campaign. As L. C. Mullgardt, an architect working on the exposition, explained to members of the Down Town Committee of the Chamber of Commerce: “As to the commercial value of beauty, we can not overestimate its vital importance. . . . Numberless American citizens annually flood Asiatic and European towns with their dollars in search for the beautiful. . . . A pecuniary reason is always a good one for doing commendable things.” Supported by the new Chamber of Commerce and the Labor Council, the Civic League brought the campaign to a climax with a May Day parade of school children carrying flowers through San Francisco. Once again civic pride, a desire that their city win recognition as a part of the nation’s and the world’s urban network, motivated San Franciscans. At the conclusion of the parade, Mayor Rolph caught the mood of many when he asserted that San Francisco “will be to America what Florence is to Italy and Paris is to France.” He urged his listeners to make San Francisco “the real Exposition City, the City Beautiful.”

In 1912, too, San Franciscans reversed their stance of just three years before and approved $8.8 million in bonds to construct a new civic center. To be located at the site of the old city hall, not at the site recommended in the Burnham Plan, the civic center had come to be seen in a new way by most San Franciscans. What they
had viewed as a luxury they could not afford in 1909 they now saw as a necessity to prepare their city for the exposition and the canal. "In view of the era of tremendous constructive development before San Francisco," Mayor Rolph told a meeting of neighborhood improvement clubs, "it will be nothing less than a calamity if these bonds are defeated." Civic pride also dictated support for the bonds. Noting that Denver, St. Paul, and Kansas City had recently constructed civic auditoriums, Rolph urged passage for the bonds to allow San Francisco to do the same. Luisa Tetrazzini, the famous opera singer, echoed the mayor, "Other cities, not as large as 'my' city, have it [a civic auditorium] already. Why not here?"

Endorsed by both the Chamber of Commerce and the Labor Council, the civic center bonds faced no organized opposition. With their city well along the road to reconstruction and with city services to the suburbs greatly improved, even most neighborhood improvement clubs, now united in the Civic League, came out for the bonds. The bonds won approval by a margin of ten to one, and construction quickly began on the first buildings of the center. By the time the exposition opened, the city hall and an auditorium had been completed.

Finally, the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, transitory though it was, came to be seen as a climax of the pre-World War I planning movement in San Francisco. Composed of romantically colored buildings grouped together at a waterfront location (what is now the Marina in San Francisco), the exposition, like Chicago's "White City" of twenty-two years before, was an inspiration for the future for many. As one San Franciscan observed, "The Exposition in its ground plan, in its architecture, in its coloring and in its sculpture is the accomplishment of a Utopian ideal in city planning." After visiting the exposition, Burnham was struck by how the fair might reinvigorate the city planning movement in San Francisco. He wrote, "If the Herculean task of developing an Exposition of such classic grandeur, will forever prove an incentive for a more harmonious expansion of our city, San Francisco's millions will have been well spent."

Many business leaders expected the exposition to bring prosperity to their city. They hoped it would win recognition for their city throughout the United States and place it ahead of its urban rivals. The manager of the Bank of California, headquartered in
San Francisco, spoke for many of his colleagues when he predicted that the exposition “will give many businessmen, who have had a hard struggle since the fire a chance to get squarely on their feet again and look the world in the face with considerable cheerfulness.” The vice-president of the Chamber of Commerce expanded on this theme when addressing a crowd at the exposition’s Chamber of Commerce Day. The exposition would, he thought, “call the attention of the world to this powerful western empire and its chief city and glorious harbor.”

More was involved in the exposition, however, than materialistic aspirations. Harkening back to what they incorrectly imagined to have been a time of social unity in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake and fire, some San Franciscans thought they discerned a moral value in the world’s fair. They hoped that the fair would unify their city’s discordant population. One wrote that “another noticeable phase of the Exposition crowd is a return of that spirit of camaraderie which was peculiar to San Francisco directly after the big fire of 1906. That was a time when social barriers were leveled, an interval of pure democracy.” Another warned that “personal ambitions, personal gain, the glorification of the individual must come second to the welfare of the whole . . . commercialism, as merely the glorification of the dollar, must not be allowed to gain a foothold.” Some members of the Chamber of Commerce were caught up in that feeling. Exhorting San Franciscans to join in an opening-day parade, the organization’s newsletter observed, “Everybody will march. There will be no horses, automobiles, floats, fancy dress, uniforms, or display of any kind.” The bulletin went on to claim that “it is the duty of every citizen and businessman to join in this wondrous demonstration. The very future of the city depends upon the success of this undertaking.”

Some San Franciscans, especially businessmen, thought they could renew the city’s leading role in the economic development of the Pacific Coast through planning. Likewise, they hoped in a more general sense to reassert their city’s place in America’s urban network.

Such expectations were only partially filled. San Franciscans did achieve some of the separate elements of city planning. New parks and boulevards were established, and beginnings were made on the building of a civic center. With the civic center San
Franciscans came, in the words of the scholar Joan Draper, as “as close as almost anybody to realizing the dream of the City Beautiful.” Nonetheless, comprehensive planning was not realized. In their haste to rebuild, San Franciscans reconstructed their city in an uncoordinated manner. The social unity sought for by the city’s business leaders proved elusive, as renewed group conflicts were to show in the war years and later. Nor were the economic goals fully realized. With the maturation of Los Angeles, Oakland, Seattle, and Portland, San Francisco’s dominance over the economy of the Pacific Coast was forever ended.

Beyond the civic center and some park and boulevard improvements, San Franciscans gained little of tangible value from their first efforts at planning. They continued to reject major changes in the layout of their city. In 1913 the consulting engineer Bion Arnold drafted a new plan for the improvement of streets and transportation facilities in San Francisco, but, like the plan drafted by Manson seven years before, it failed to win acceptance. Once again, divisions among different groups hindered its implementation. While parts of the plan were adopted, much of it was ignored. Thus, by the time of the First World War, many proponents of planning believed that they had missed a golden opportunity to rebuild in a comprehensive way after the fire and earthquake. The Burnham Plan had been abandoned. “We used to hear a great deal about the ‘City Beautiful’ and the opportunity we have for municipal adornment,” mused the publication of the Civic League in 1915, “but somehow the city planning pendulum seems to have swung the other way.”