

## Summary of Round 2 Community Meetings

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2009

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2009

### INTRODUCTION

In February 2009, the City of Oakland organized two community workshops as part of the Citywide Zoning Update. The first meeting was held on Thursday, February 26, 2009 from 5:45 P.M. to 7:45 P.M. at the West Oakland Public Library. The second meeting was held on Saturday, February 28, 2009 from 10:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M. in the auditorium of Bella Vista Elementary School located at 1025 E. 28<sup>th</sup> Street. The purpose of these meetings was to discuss zoning issues in the City's commercial corridors and residential areas, familiarize the community with the zoning update process and obtain feedback from the community. Both of the meetings followed the same agenda.

### MEETING FORMAT

The objective for these meetings was to engage meeting attendees in interactive dialogues through two sets of scenarios – one for a residential area and the other for a commercial corridor. Each meeting was approximately 2 hours in length.

When they signed in, attendees were given a name tag and packet of information (**Appendix A** includes the meeting agenda and handouts for the residential and commercial zoning discussions). They were then directed to review and comment on a series of photos posted on a wall that showed different kinds of buildings in Oakland and/or visit the Zoning and General Plan Reference Table where City planners or consultant staff were available to answer general questions. Participants were encouraged to write comments next to the photos about their concerns and issues, and about what they liked and disliked about the buildings. Overall, participants were highly engaged in this activity; at the second community meeting, many attendees stayed after the workshop to continue discussing the images on the wall with City staff.

Each meeting began with a welcome and PowerPoint presentation delivered by Eric Angstadt, Deputy Director of Oakland's Community and Economic Development Agency (CEDA). He provided a brief discussion of the General Plan's relationship to zoning, basic zoning concepts, current zoning issues, as well as an overview of the meeting's agenda. After the presentation, participants were asked to begin at one of the two small group discussion sessions to which they had been randomly assigned when they signed in.

The major portion of the workshop was dedicated to discussing residential zoning issues and commercial corridor zoning issues in facilitated small group sessions. Each discussion session was designed to provide a structured but open dialogue among City staff and participants. They were led by City staff facilitator(s) and lasted about 50 minutes. At the halfway point allotted to the small group sessions, participants switched to the discussion topic they had not yet addressed. Each staff facilitator had a note-taker who graphically recorded on large sheets of paper

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participants' comments and questions. This allowed for participants to visually see their feedback publicly documented. For both meetings, there were six small groups – equally distributed between residential and commercial discussions.

The goals of the break out sessions were to:

1. Present a potential real life scenario of how development can be affected by zoning regulations,
2. Inform attendees about prevalent issues and problems with the existing zoning code,
3. Provide tools that can help address the issues, and
4. Collect input on the identified issues, as well as the different types of tools to address them.

The commercial group discussed the following two scenarios that illustrated zoning issues arising along Oakland's major commercial corridors:

- *Scenario A* discussed development standards such as building size and shape, interaction with low-density zones, ground floor treatments and upper floor treatments. The tools to address building size and shape included setting height limits or floor area ratios (FARs); rear setbacks and setbacks were introduced as ways to address the interaction between buildings along the corridor and low-density zones abutting those buildings to the rear. To deal with ground floor treatments, staff suggested step backs, visible storefronts and distinctive entrances, and finally, with upper floor treatments, staff identified enforcing different faces, diversity of materials, and varied window patterns.
- *Scenario B* dealt with the types of land use activities that can occur on properties and how these uses are regulated by zoning. This included discussion of the land uses desired by the community and the possible impacts or benefits of different activities and identification of zoning tools that regulate land uses, including lists of permitted/conditionally permitted uses, limits on size of use and types of ground floor uses.

The residential group discussion focused on the following three scenarios:

- *Scenario A* illustrated the issue of how zoning can address the compatibility of the bulk, scale and massing of new buildings and/or additions in the R-50 Medium Density Residential Zone and the General Plan Mixed Housing Type land use designation. Zoning tools that were identified to reduce the bulk of a building in Mixed Housing Type areas included: limiting lot coverage, requiring buildings to step back, vertically breaking up the building (articulation), and/or breaking up the building into separate structures around a courtyard.
- *Scenario B* dealt with how to regulate commercial uses in an R-50 Medium Density Residential Zone. Most existing residential zones do not allow any commercial uses; legal nonconforming uses are allowed provided that they have not been vacant for over one year. Group participants discussed the pros and cons of several options to address commercial uses in predominantly residential areas including: permitting limited commercial uses by right; permitting limited commercial uses under certain circumstances; conditionally permitting commercial uses based on criteria such as

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size and building type; creating a new zone where neighborhood commercial uses are allowed in residential areas; and/or prohibiting neighborhood commercial uses.

- *Scenario C* presented the issue of an existing single-family house on a narrow lot in an R-40 Zone. The potential zoning tools that were identified for facilitating a home addition were: reducing the required sideyard setback for narrow lots to three feet from the existing five-foot required sideyard setback, developing a sliding scale for front and sideyard setbacks (tied to lot width/size), and/or maintain the current standards and discourage additions on small lots.

## **MEETING PUBLICITY**

There were many forms of publicity for these workshops. A notice was posted on the web events calendar of the *Oakland Tribune* as well as in the newspaper community calendar. Emails were sent to reporters at the *Oakland Tribune* and the *San Francisco Chronicle* requesting a story about the meeting. Emails were sent to nearly 400 people or groups consisting of community groups, Business Improvement Districts (BID), Project Area Committees (PAC), Neighborhood Crime Prevention Councils (NCPC), different chambers of commerce and numerous people who were already on the email distribution list. Those groups and organizations were asked to help spread the word by forwarding the email. Over 200 churches were sent flyers to post on their bulletin boards/newsletters. Flyers were also distributed to the staff of the City Council and the Community and Economic Development Agency (CEDA) with a request for distribution to contacts and/or at any City meeting. Additionally, all members of the residential and commercial Technical Advisory Groups were asked to help get the word about the community meetings through email, posting flyers at local coffee shops, dry cleaners, grocery stores, etc. Finally, flyers were posted at libraries, community centers and other commercial areas throughout the City.

## **ATTENDANCE**

Excluding City of Oakland planning and consultant staff, approximately 56 people attended the first community meeting, and approximately 49 people attended the second community meeting. Attendees were welcomed at the entrance and asked to sign in. Information such as name, street address, zip code, email address, phone number and Council District were obtained. Upon signing in at the second community workshop, City staff asked attendees how they were informed about the community meeting. A majority obtained information via email, some through word of mouth and Technical advisory groups, and a few through District 3 mailing list, City Council offices, and the Zoning Office.

## **MEETING MATERIALS**

Participants were provided with:

- A meeting agenda
- 2 handouts for the Residential small group discussion

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- 1 handout for the Commercial small group discussion
- 2 comment cards (Separate sheets for residential and commercial feedback)

Workshop participants were given the option to turn in comment cards at the end of the meeting, or to send them to City staff via email, fax, or regular mail.

## **SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK**

The following is a summary of feedback received during the small group discussion sessions and from comment cards that were collected at the two community meetings and faxed to the City. **Appendix B** includes notes transcribed from the small group discussions; **Appendix C** includes copies of all comment cards received.

### **Commercial/Corridor Zoning Small Group Discussion**

**Scenario A:** Participants discussed the potential development standards which will shape the new buildings on the commercial corridors: the height and density of new residential development, as well as specific design regulations.

The topic of height, and how to appropriately regulate it, sparked a variety of ideas. Some participants wanted to see taller buildings on the corridors, others wanted to restrict the heights of new buildings from being taller than that of existing buildings. If taller buildings are allowed, participants suggested they be located:

- downtown (but not where it would “crowd out” open space);
- on corners (as long as the design isn’t too “monolithic”);
- near adequate transit (specified as BART, not AC Transit);
- on wide streets and on the commercial corridors.

People who wanted restrictions on taller buildings, cited:

- that height limits were necessary to protect older, established neighborhoods
- that new buildings should be regulated to step back to the height of adjacent buildings, and that there shouldn’t be “abrupt” transitions between new and older buildings;
- the idea that “prevalent heights” on a corridor should be taken into account, and a conditional use permit required if new buildings would be one story higher than adjacent buildings;
- the need for a shadow study to gauge the effect of a new building’s height on neighboring buildings.

The topic of density—the number of residential units allowed on a particular parcel of land—also created lively discussion. Speakers wanted higher density buildings in particular locations: on the commercial corridors; near public transportation; as long as neighboring residents don’t lose “solar access”; with updated design guidelines that require more group open space (and good views). Several people wanted to see good examples and better regulations for new buildings on the corridors, so the taller buildings would have more distance and less impact on the adjacent residential lots in the rear.

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Creating pedestrian-friendly shopping streets was mentioned by many groups: people wanted more street furniture, such as trees, benches, street lamps, bus shelters, restaurant seating and sidewalk café's, to create a better pedestrian atmosphere. Many participants felt that the commercial corridors should encourage mixed use developments that discourage 'non-active' commercial uses (such as offices and consulting services) on the ground-floor and encourage residential uses on the upper floors. Several people mentioned that a range of building materials and various design facades should be promoted, especially on the ground floor.

Many participants wanted to preserve the historic building character of the commercial corridors and some suggested looking to the established buildings of the street for design ideas for new buildings. Many creative ideas for enhancing the commercial corridors of Oakland emerged from the workshops, for example:

- the suggestion that the City should acquire vacant land while prices are low, to promote civic uses and open space on those lots;
- that the City should write zoning regulations that encourage "what works" in other neighborhoods;
- That the new zoning should use innovative and "progressive" elements of a newly adopted zone, the HBX (Housing and Business Mix, adapting it to the commercial corridors.

**Scenario B:** People discussed their thoughts regarding the kinds of activities that should be allowed on commercial corridors throughout the City. Most people expressed the desire to have more neighborhood-serving uses, such as retail shops, restaurants, grocery stores and barber shops, located within walking distance of where they lived. Many wanted to encourage small, local businesses to create employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for Oakland residents. Some people were also interested in having a larger national franchise, such as a Safeway, Trader Joes or Walgreens, that could serve as a core tenant in a commercial area. People wanted to see a variety of uses on the commercial corridors that could provide a variety of neighborhood services. Related to this, people mentioned that some areas had too many of a certain type of use: liquor stores, auto-related uses (gas stations, car dealerships and repair shops), nail salons, laundromats, or churches. Participants thought that some restrictions to uses, particularly on the ground floor, might be okay in established and thriving retail areas. However, people also generally agreed that an occupied building was preferable to a vacant building, so restrictions should not make it too hard to open a new business, especially in areas where there were already a lot of commercial vacancies. People noted that sometimes the design of a building or storefront mattered as much as the type of activity occurring there. For example, people generally thought that there should be no parking lots in front of buildings in small commercial neighborhood areas. People were interested in requiring that new development provide a flexible ground-floor structure that would work well for a variety of uses, including retail, office or residential.

**Comment cards:** Ten comment cards were received pertaining to the commercial corridors. With regards to development standards, some responded that they would like to see more mixed use construction of commercial/retail on the ground floor with residential on top; adequate parking for both commercial and residential uses; regulations for green open space and better

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pedestrian-friendly walkways . As far as uses and activities, ideas ranged from including more restaurants, cafes, florists, boutiques and medical facilities to requiring better street furniture such as lighting, benches and trees. A few people were open to uses and activities as long as they served the particular neighborhood.

**Residential Zoning Small Group Discussion**

**Scenario A:** With regards to building bulk, scale and massing, many agreed that new development should fit the context of the existing neighborhood and that “boxy”, “featureless buildings” should be avoided. Numerous attendees felt that better regulations, design guidelines including guidelines for window treatments, entryways and facade treatments should be enforced. Most people agreed that the range of zoning tools presented by staff would be useful to limit building bulk.

Many liked the idea of limiting lot coverage; however, a few felt that lot coverage should be determined by looking at the neighbor’s lot and the mix of buildings on the block in question. A handful of people expressed that excessive front paving should be limited. There was not a consensus, however, about using courtyards to break up buildings and reduce bulk. Some claimed this was more costly and limited residents’ privacy, while others felt that courtyards were good for promoting green open space. Many were in favor of green roofs and solar panels and utilizing landscape articulation to make buildings more interesting and to alleviate bulk. A few expressed concerns about preserving green open space when possible. There was not a consensus about parking concerns; rather a variety of suggestions were posed such as stacked parking, rear parking, underground parking, and parking limitations.

**Scenario B:** When discussing how to regulate commercial uses in residential zones, in almost every small group discussion, many complained that there were too many poorly regulated liquor stores in residential neighborhoods. A majority of participants felt that the City should restrict alcohol sales in residential zones and should implement greater regulations on what is sold in these stores. Also, many people were concerned with the intensive amount of auto-related uses (gas stations, auto repairs, motorcycle shops, etc.) in residential zones. A number of people were concerned about nearby residents being negatively affected by fumes and pollution of local nail salons. For the most part, participants were okay with commercial uses such as grocery stores, barbershops, dry cleaners, pet shops, flower shops and afterschool activities in residential neighborhoods as long as they specifically served the neighborhood’s needs and were compatible with the neighborhood context.

Suggested ways to regulate commercial uses in residential neighborhoods included restricting hours of operation and enforcing proper ventilation systems and desirable window treatments. Many were in favor of restaurants and cafes in residential neighborhoods. Some suggested regulating restaurants and cafes near public transit to eliminate potential traffic and noise pollution. Several people favored live/work lofts.

**Scenario C:** For additions to existing single-family houses on narrow lots, most people felt that it depended on the context of the lot in the existing neighborhood and that there should be

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flexibility for specific situations. Some expressed that having different regulations and standards for small lots are okay.

**Comment Cards:** Ten comment cards were received pertaining to the residential zoning discussion. For this particular dialogue; however, there was not one common thread about what tools could be used to address bulky buildings. A variety of suggestions were posed such as emphasizing landscaping, different window treatments, vertical building, varied building materials and façade treatment, larger backyards, requiring courtyards and dividing up the building. A few were in favor of increasing and reusing spaces for commercial purposes and businesses. One suggested that the City review a prospective commercial business and marketing plan.

### **WRAP UP/NEXT STEPS**

At the end of the small group discussion, Deputy Director Eric Angstadt gave concluding remarks about the next steps in the zoning update process and how to stay involved and informed. The next round of community meetings is scheduled for later in 2009 to discuss draft zoning concepts and mapping. Meeting schedule and other information about the zoning update is available online at the Zoning Update Website at [www.oaklandnet.com/zoningupdate](http://www.oaklandnet.com/zoningupdate). Members of the public may send questions or comments to Planning staff via email at [zoningupdate@oaklandnet.com](mailto:zoningupdate@oaklandnet.com) or call the Zoning Update Phone Message Line at (510)238-7299.

### **APPENDIX A: MEETING HANDOUTS**

The following handouts were distributed at both February 26 and 28 community meetings.

### **APPENDIX B: TRANSCRIBED NOTES FROM SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

The following were transcribed from the notes taken by facilitators during the small group discussions at the February 26 and 28 community workshops. The workshop notes are presented in chronological order starting with the residential zoning groups, followed by the commercial zoning groups.

### **APPENDIX C: COMMENT CARDS**

The following comment cards were received from the February 26 and 28 community workshops. They are presented in chronological order starting with the residential zoning groups, followed by the commercial zoning groups.