

**Stakeholder Interview Notes
Neighborhood Stakeholder Meeting
February 23, 2009, 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.
Conference Rm. 2, Council Chambers**

Meeting Issue: Infill/Redevelopment, Density, and Neighborhood Character

GROUP CHARACTERISTICS

This group included several representatives from the Southwest Neighborhood and Chico Avenues Neighborhood. Residents from the Sunset Avenue neighborhood also attended. Attendees also included four local architects, who reside and work inside the City limits, as well as a local developer and owner of historic residential properties. The group was generally evenly divided on whether the issue of solving infill development challenges should focus more on compatible density or compatible design. It was generally agreed that established neighborhoods in the City have an eclectic architectural style that is an agreeable pattern of design for Chico.

Below are the individuals that attended:

Barbara Morrison	Matt Gallaway	Adam Fedeli	Nan Jones
Debbie Villasenor	Mike Campos	Pam Stoesser	John White
Elle Ertle	Kasey Merrill	Cindy Maderos	
TJ Glenn	Greg Steel	Stephen Ertle	

Questions for Discussion:

- 1) What are the best ways for the City to achieve higher density housing on infill and redevelopment sites to meet our future housing needs? Do you believe solutions to successful infill development should focus on design or density, or a combination of both?**
 - The attendees were somewhat evenly divided that both density and design are equally important. One example cited by an attendee of an infill project that achieved a compatible density but lacked compatible design was the parcel map/planned development permit located at the southwest corner of E. 7th and Palm Avenues.
 - The attendees believed that enforcement of property maintenance (such as through a strong junk ordinance or through requirements for on-site ownership) is as important as good design.
 - One attendee noted that density is more important than design, and that government should be much less involved in reviewing and approving design.
 - One attendee noted that the City should consider allowing more density by calculating bedrooms rather than units as a gauge of density (e.g., a very successful infill project on Pomona Avenue, where the developer constructed single-family homes with an historic design, but rented

multiple bedrooms to students). His point is that compatibility of infill is achievable more through design than density.

Staff asked the attendees to consider how the City can achieve a compromise of design and density while meeting the goal of the preferred land use alternative for a compact urban form?

- One attendee stated that the City must first address how to mitigate impacts associated w/infill in the specific neighborhood where the infill projects are built, e.g., impacts related to added traffic, infrastructure (sewer, storm, sidewalks), rather than collecting development impact fees that may be appropriated elsewhere in the City.
- Staff stated that funding mechanisms to address potential impacts created by the preferred alternative will be investigated through the required Financing Plan for the General Plan and EIR process.
- One attendee voiced similar concerns regarding lack of infrastructure in the Sunset Avenue district where small infill opportunities may be attractive.
- One attendee echoed the concerns that impacts related to infill must be mitigated in the immediate neighborhood where they are generated and include mitigation for bicycle safety, traffic impacts to alleys, and illegal parking across sidewalks.
- One attendee noted that the standard of requiring owner occupancy for second dwelling units (with the intent of maintaining property) is adverse to investor driven second units. Therefore, can we enforce property maintenance through another mechanism (e.g., stronger junk ordinance).

2) What are your ideas for addressing the neighborhood character problem (real or perceived) with higher density/intensity infill projects locating adjacent to lower density/intensity neighborhoods and uses?

- One attendee noted that smaller infill projects are as time consuming (and costly for staff or the developer) as a larger infill projects, the point being, that even the smallest infill projects can be costly.
- One attendee noted that demographics (e.g., students housing versus family housing) is an important issue when developing projects in neighborhoods with mixed demographics.
- One attendee noted that neighborhoods with many rental units leads to unpredictable behavior of residents, and therefore, a sometimes tenuous place to raise a family or invest as an owner-occupant.
- It was generally agreed by the attendees that neighborhood plans can lend regulatory help for infill projects, citing the Chapman-Mulberry plans has implementing mechanism of reviewing single family home design.
- The “Chico Charmer” was recognized by many attendees as an attractive persona of distinctive older single-family homes, but lacked identifiable design elements or style. It was agreed that design guidelines for single-

family infill would be aided by defining a “Chico Charmer” in tangible terms.

- Staff and the attendees discussed whether a “checklist” of design guidelines would be helpful in the case of administrative review of single-family home development, and whether such a checklist should ensure that the design character surrounding an infill site be replicated. Kasey Merrill suggested a checklist for infill development would be tough, because in some cases, it may not be best to match the surrounding character of an infill site, and that an improvement to the existing scenario may be appropriate. Therefore, successful design guidelines should be cautious about “a one-size fits all” approach. A successful approach would be to first identify characteristics that are worth blending with new development. Secondly, to identify housing stock that is folding in the neighborhood as a type of design worth changing. Design for infill should also consider the evolution of alleys and particularly second units in the immediate area of an infill site. And although second units don’t count towards density, they should be considered in discretionary approvals of infill development. Casey suggested to start by densifying the Downtown, before you begin infill in the outlying neighborhoods.
- One attendee reiterated that livability doesn’t have so much to do with the renters (e.g., students vs. families) as does regulation of property maintenance.

Staff posed the question: How can the City write policies to address these issues?

- One attendee would prefer garages off of the alleys in older neighborhoods and would be concerned about second units facing the alleys, e.g., balconies, and thereby directing related noise, activity, or other “social” problems into the alleys.
- 3) Does the City need a new policy or policies regarding design considerations for neighborhood character and infill development, specifically with regard to scale and form?**
- One attendee noted that designers should have less government interference to allow more flexibility and to not stymie innovation. She noted that an overall eclectic architectural style is OK, with context being the most important consideration, and less so of scale or form.
 - One attendee noted that if the quality of housing stock is going down, then we don’t need to match this sort of surrounding neighborhood character with infill development.
 - One attendee noted that considering the architectural context of neighborhoods can be overwhelming due to the diverse details inherent in many Chico neighborhoods. Therefore, a broader context of larger geographic areas needs to be considered in policies, where common themes can be identified. Density can play the “heavy” role in crushing an

- existing neighborhood, less so of design (which can be more solvable). As a result, achieving the density projections of the preferred alternative, through small infill projects, becomes apparently less doable.
- One attendee emphasized the need for policy or guidelines to support urban forests to help mitigate heat gain generated by new development and to mitigate privacy impacts.
 - One attendee asked how can the City successfully infill neighborhoods when at the same time support the removal of established housing to accommodate the growth of the CSUC and Enloe Hospital (i.e., these goals are contradictory). Further, how does the City expect to support more housing through infill without mitigating the added impacts of such growth-inducing projects?
 - Greg Steele (representing Sierra Sunrise retirement neighborhood) suggested to consider incentives that encourage infill through requiring lower development impact fees in the areas identified to best serve infill, and to require higher fees in areas where infill is less feasible. Mr. Steele also suggested to annex larger, contiguous areas, rather than on a project-by-project basis (citing the proposed Manzanita Estates project currently in process at the southwest corner of Manzanita and Centennial Avenues, particularly in such low-lying basin areas where an area-wide solution to storm drainage is needed).
 - Staff noted that the Finance Plan required to implement the GP Update can provide a basis for analyzing such techniques suggested by Mr. Steele.
 - One attendee suggested that the RDA finance infrastructure in these annexable areas where current improvements are substandard. Shawn noted that, in fact, the RDA is financing the two neighborhood plans where existing infrastructure is substandard, and staff is looking at a similar financing strategy for a broader neighborhood planning process.
 - One attendee believed that more neighborhood plans is the key, and to look at the entire City on a neighborhood (geographic) basis, and approach the design of infill projects accordingly.
 - One attendee was concerned with an ad-hoc approach to design, looking at older neighborhoods separated from the new neighborhoods, which is not a comprehensive approach to improving or facilitating infill development. Staff suggested it may be best to first complete the City-wide design guidelines, and then move to neighborhood plans and guidelines.
 - One attendee noted that blight needs to be recognized and defined better through GP policy to better tap into RDA funds.
- 4) Do you believe that additional regulation of single-family residential design is necessary (for both discretionary and non-discretionary projects), recognizing that it would require additional City staff time and funding?**

- One attendee noted that the Chapman-Mulberry Plan is a good example for regulating single-family. A good example of infill development in an eclectic neighborhood is a relatively new tri-plex on E. 2nd Avenue just east of the Esplanade which fits with the established character of the residential and commercial uses that includes the Red Tavern Restaurant.
- One attendee noted that regulation may be problematic as far as funding realistic guidelines for each individual neighborhood.
- Several attendees believe that some regulation is necessary.

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