

## February 25, 2009 GPAC Meeting Notes

### Meeting Topic: Economic Development Policy Discussion

#### In Attendance

**GPAC Members:** Nancy Ostrom, Jim Stevens, David Kim, Michael Worley, Jim Owens, Sara Adams, Dave Kelley, Thomas Murphy, Kirk Monfort  
**PMC staff:** Pam Johns, Scott Friend  
**City Staff:** Steve Peterson, Brendan Vieg, Meredith Williams, Martha Wescoat-Andes

Number of audience members: 9

#### *Question #1: Shovel Ready Sites*

##### 1. a. What does "shovel ready" mean to you?

###### Group comments

- A list of ready projects, already approved, or with remaining approvals at staff level only, mid-to-small sized parcels though, not large ones.
- A 'shovel-ready site' is one that has infrastructure to the site, has a clean title and that can receive a building permit quickly.
- Sites that an applicant could pull a permit on quickly, without environmental or regulatory issues.
- Shouldn't be solely defined from a business perspective; it must also consider the neighborhood impacts and the community's desires.

###### Individual Comments

- Focus on projects that are supportive of CSUC and Butte College.
- The City of Chico has people not land as a resource rather than land and not people.

##### b. Should the City commit resources to ensure "shovel ready sites" (ready to go land) for new jobs, sales tax, and/or TOT-generating uses?

###### Group comments

- Yes
- City should conduct studies and create a vision for which kind of businesses to attract.

###### Individual Comments

- Concerned about the tradeoffs of spending RDA funds on economic development at the expense of what?
- Don't use any local funds on it (in the near term); only use outside grant sources
- The City shouldn't assume that the "if we build it they will come" theory will actually work.

- City involvement can get landowners to sell for development when they otherwise do nothing and wait for land value to increase or zoning to change (to retail).

**c. If so, how should the City proceed? Should the City consider getting involved in land ownership and pre-development? Should the City target certain jobs and businesses (e.g., high paying jobs, green businesses)?**

Group comments

- Yes,
- Partner with Chico-state; target industries that hire students, college-grads.
- Encourage more graduate studies programs at CSUC.
- Remove hurdles to allow better, creative development to proceed, but don't have the City become a developer.
- Look at research triangle, North Carolina as an example for having a vision for the use of agency resources and then making it happen.
- No, it's scary to think of the City becoming more of a landlord. The City shouldn't be competing with developers...whether for profit or not.
- If the City is involved in the land ownership process, then there is not a level playing field for market forces.
- The City should get involved in the land ownership process if market forces alone have not yielded the desired results (e.g. creation of land for base-employment uses).
- Target green industry, green collar jobs.

**d. Should resources include use of public funds? Prioritized infrastructure investments? Other?**

Group comments

- Yes.
- Plan the installation of infrastructure as an investment, instead of reacting to development and ending up with poor connectivity because it's all been installed when private development can fund it.
- The City needs to have a set of defined and public debated criteria as to when and where the City would use public funds for infrastructure improvements.
- Extend basic services and general infrastructure if whole neighborhoods can benefit, not just for a single property owner.
- Any efforts by the City should be "in front of" the market rather than reacting to the market so that the City's investment stimulates a City goal or program.

Individual Comments

- The City should not use local funds entirely but should always leverage outside funds for land purchase or infrastructure extension efforts.
- The City should assist in the 'packaging' of sites (bringing together multiple owners, researching title status', etc.)
- The City should be in the business of promoting the City and its opportunities and not in the business of directly creating the opportunity themselves.

## **Question #2: Redevelopment/Reuse**

- 2. Given the city's limited redevelopment authority (no eminent domain), what strategies should be available to incentivize redevelopment and reuse in Chico?**

### Individual Comments

- Because of the Preferred Alternative, development fees in the City core must be reduced and fees increased for projects at the City edge/Greenfield areas.
- Infill must be incentivized. The City must assist the process of getting improvements/infrastructure for areas surrounding individual projects. Require that the fees collected from a development incrementally payback the RDA-funded local improvements. Reimburse developers for improvements they make beyond the bare minimum or beyond what is necessary to support their projects alone.
- Incentivize rehabilitation of older neighborhoods with fee reductions for infill projects and levee higher fees for the higher costs of serving new outlying areas.
- Offer incentives to keep suites rented/occupied in existing developments and disincentivize vacant retail suites.
- Have a list of incentives that can be picked from to best suit the individual project; keep it flexible.
- Start with a vision and create implementation mechanisms to meet that vision. Keep 'place-making' in mind (e.g.: active Downtown nightlife, elite cycling course, Baseball field area as a destination).
- Continue neighborhood planning to mitigate NIMBY reactions. Then create incentives and tools for developers to match the City/neighborhood's vision. Utilize a neighborhood-based planning approach for both Residential and Non-Residential planning.
- Provide for lower fees on infill projects. The City can use money to assemble properties, but eminent domain is not the 'Chico-way'. Instead, use the City's bonding authority, low-income loans, look to our low-income housing programs as a model for economic development.
- Celebrate the City's success stories, especially on the Web...draw businesses to Chico through the Web, using place-making "marketing".
- Offer incentives for property owners to work together to assemble properties and develop together.
- Plan major corridors, not just neighborhoods. Then, use incentives to get people to develop to the vision standards.
- Extend the façade improvement program to get landlords to upgrade buildings.
- The City should get involved in a long-term location for an "incubator" for start-ups.....Martha responded that the business model is more important than location for the success of an incubator.

## **Question #3: Project Review Process**

- 3. a. While still respecting the public process, how can the City of Chico streamline the project review process to better accommodate the needs of business?**

### Group comments

- Elect Council members by neighborhoods or districts to keep activists in one neighborhood from hijacking the decisions of the entire City Council.
- Require Planning Commissions to honor previous Commission decisions.
- Don't repeat everything at Council that happens at PC.
- Assign one staff member to each project.
- Train citizen-volunteers better to be effective members of the boards, much more than they are now.
- Take Neighborhood plans to the regulatory level.
- Make sure building inspections are more consistent, predictable.
- Continue pre-application meetings and react to the public input in project design, even using citizens as a first-run hearing body.
- Respect community (CSUC) time frames for public input by avoiding summer hearings for big issue items.
- Understand that there will be some projects that the community won't want no matter what.
- Have staff be educators to boards/commissions about their role during hearings and to help keep meetings shorter
- Post-approval changes should be run through a public process again, so the neighbors don't feel ignored or that the City/developer pulled a "bait & switch".
- Educate the public about what this GP vision will look like, through visual examples, so the public understands the impact of the infill we're planning.

### Individual Comments

- Homebuyers need to be educated about City plans & how they may be different than what their realtor said.
- Use form-based codes and require the greater use of visual materials to show what a project will look and feel like.

### **b. Should there be further project streamlining for key economic development projects, and what should that improved process look like?**

#### Group comments

- Prioritize project processing for those that meet our goals (i.e., mixed-use, no-runoff, infill, green). Let these kinds go to the front of the line.
- Streamline to keep our regional retail leader status.
- Create vision plans for corridors in addition to neighborhood plans to determine compatibility instead of density measures. These decisions need to be made consistently every time, same interpretation, so that investors/developers are more willing to take the risk of investing.
- Have a point based community design manual to make things more predictable and less judgmental

#### Individual Comments

- Common ground between neighborhood citizens' and developers' desires can be found though using visual renderings in plans, so that everyone can agree upon/point to a common example of what's acceptable.
- How many applicants have actually pulled out or opted not to apply here because of a faulty process?...what has been the opportunity cost?
- Front-load the public input and participation process by enhancing noticing requirements, require a 'feed back loop' approach to public input by providing additional information to buyers of new homes about their neighborhoods.

### **Final Public Comments**

- Make Chico business friendly, improve our reputation to those inside and outside Chico.
- Make process predictable with design guidelines, but then don't make project-level pre-application meetings mandatory.
- Let Council members select their own commissioners, 1 to 1.
- Consistency is THE most important thing, no matter what the decisions are.
- Improve data collection on who's being served, Planning's "case load"; create a database of customer needs and customer satisfaction.
- Chico is a college town, but it's also an Ag town, connect to local food producers.
- Get new perspectives by reaching out to the non-regulars (non-meeting attendees).
- Commission and ARB will act more consistently when more refined guidelines are in place.
- Butte College is producing Green-tech workers, tap into them as well.
- Support local farmers who produce food for Chico with incentives and protection.
- It's foolish to think Chico will return to its previous status as a regional hub for retail....those days are likely gone due to higher travel costs.