

**Stakeholder Meeting Notes
Builder Developer Group
March 11, 2009**



GROUP CHARACTERISTICS

This meeting was attended by 17 people representing local builders and developers in Chico. Many of these people are long time Chico residents with extensive experience developing projects in the area.

MIXED USE

This group has been consistently concerned about mandating mixed use. Most felt even if the City is willing to invest in critical infrastructure to support its development (e.g., road improvements, changes in parking requirements), mixed-use projects may be too expensive to build and therefore unlikely to be developed. There was some support for mixed-use development in the downtown area however; the group remained concerned about parking and the cost of rehabilitating existing structures. There was also concern about how much influence the Planning Commission may have in determining design characteristics of specific projects. If the City is going to “sell” mixed-use, Chico needs to have a success story to demonstrate to the market that vertical mixed use can work. The City may need to help get those successful projects in place.

INFILL POLICY/NEIGHBORHOOD COMPATIBILITY

The group discussed what the City hopes to accomplish in the General Plan with regard to infill. There wasn't necessarily agreement. Some felt that though the existing Plan does not discuss infill in terms of increasing density that is the City's expectation and what prompts residents' argument against it. The group supports the idea of infill in certain areas but expressed concern that the existing Plan has many conflicting policies that often compete with the goal of maintaining neighborhoods and community character and charm.

Compatibility of projects with existing buildings/home is also a large concern. There is a belief that compatibility with surrounding neighborhoods should mean the same or lower density, not higher density. Most agreed that in Chico, most people are concerned about their property lines and the need to address the transition between existing and new development.

The idea that design trumps density in terms of acceptance of infill projects wasn't supported by the group.

The group supported a policy that would allow developments that mimic a neighborhood in density and design to be approved by staff without the design/review process. Projects that do not mimic the neighborhood would go through the planned development process.

The group believes that the General Plan should be clear that infill is critical and has specific design criteria – then get out of the way and don't require discretionary review.

GREEN BUILDING

All agreed that existing State mandates through Title 24 are sufficient and that the City does not need to establish additional mandatory criteria for Green Building. The group would support incentives for Green Building but again, expressed concern the certain programs may be cost prohibitive at this time. They prefer to market to determine the level of compliance required.

PROJECT REVIEW PROCESS

There was universal concern regarding what is perceived as an arbitrary review process that allows the Planning Commission to redesign projects after developers have invested in professional design. There was support for substantive design guidelines/manual to help define neighborhood plans.

The group felt that the concept of streamlining is disingenuous in Chico because of decision makers (primarily PC) has not been willing to allow it to happen. The group believes that once criteria are in place, they ought to be able to run with a project – no architectural review board.

The group liked the idea of getting rid of the mandatory neighborhood meetings. Good developers with good projects hold these anyway and making them mandatory sets a tone that is not effective or productive.

Bottom line is that they are looking for a system that allows them a reasonable expectation that if they follow the procedures, codes and General Plan guidelines; their projects will not be derailed or redesigned by the Planning Commission or other committee.

OTHER

Regarding economic development, the City does not have lots of resources but can and should offer flexibility and incentives such as a reduction in the permits (e.g., CUP) and special credits (e.g., sewer fee).

The group believes the General Plan needs to make available adequate land for single family homes now or risk the challenge of having to revisit the Plan in five to seven years.