

August 8, 2011
Laney Bistro, Laney College Campus
900 Fallon Street, Oakland, CA 94607
5:30 to 8:00 p.m.

LAKE MERRITT STATION AREA PLAN
COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS GROUP (CSG) MEETING #10
Emerging Plan

MEETING SUMMARY

Members of the Community Stakeholders Group (CSG) attended the meeting on August 8, 2011 at the Laney Bistro. The meeting included a presentation of the Emerging Plan as developed and refined based on comments from the preceding two meetings on land use: buildings and public space, and transportation. The presentation includes proposals for area wide topics as well as refined big idea and vision and transportation improvements by study area.

Many of the original land use proposals related to buildings and public spaces were seen positively, as well as proposals related to transportation and street design. In this round, further changes were made to revise the proposals, narrow down the options, and revise major issues identified, for example building height and bulk. Comments at this meeting continued to focus on areas that still need to be revised. CSG members will have until August 15th to provide additional comments.

CSG DISCUSSION

CSG members provided comments throughout the presentation of the proposed Emerging Plan. The presentation with proposals is available in the meeting materials (available on the project website). CSG members offered several suggestions and comments to build on and enhance the proposals put forth. CSG comments are organized by area below.

CSG COMMENTS BY STUDY AREA

14th Street

- Suggested retaining the idea of using underground vaults for trees on 14th Street where underground infrastructure doesn't allow regular planting. Noted that it is expensive, but possible, as has been done on Market Street in San Francisco.
- Overall question on parks: Will parks be part of a private development or will they be publically accessible?
 - Answer – yes, they will be publically accessible
- Question on site example development - where would curb cuts be to access parking?
 - Answer – On Alice Street.
- Question on Oak Street – where does it start widening in terms of Jack London Square?
 - Answer – At 6th
- Comments on Alice Street:
 - Emphasize the importance of pedestrian scale lighting on Alice.

- Some feedback that street trees are lower priority than lighting; also a suggestion to alternate between trees and pedestrian scale lighting and trees, ensuring that pedestrian lighting isn't hidden by overgrown street trees.
- Noted that the illustration doesn't sufficiently show the lighting – suggested to show more pedestrian oriented street lights before goes to public.

East Lake Gateway

- Question regarding the illustrative Plan for Measure DD plan, which shows the land on east side of the Channel as a park; by showing development on that parcel (site 44) are we in conflict with measure DD?
 - Staff noted that the illustration is misleading; the remainder parcel will be sold (not developed as park space).
- Noted that the gateway doesn't necessarily have to be a building – could also create a gateway without 'gateway' architecture – might make sense to keep it as park space.
- Noted that tenants in 1200 Lakeshore are concerned about too much height related to blocking their views to the bay – they would prefer something lower or more open space.
 - Protected views are for one or two-unit residences; none for multifamily.
- Question about how literally to take the massing?
 - Response: the diagrams are for massing only– not building design.
- Is this a Specific Plan, how prescriptive will the plan be?
 - Response: The Plan will have detailed regulations.

Laney/Peralta

- 10th Street by Laney College
 - Would AC Transit stops stay in same location in the 10th street redesign? Noted that no assumptions should be made about AC Transit service.
 - Would rain gardens pick up water from street and sidewalk? If so would a sidewalk redesign be needed?
 - Response: it would pick up water from both, but would not require a complete grading.
 - Request to show pedestrian oriented lighting more clearly.
- Support self-determination on Laney Site.
- Channel parks comments:
 - Noted that spending money on public parks along channel is not a priority and some members feel is a waste of public resources and funding.
 - Response: the parks along the channel are regional assets and a citywide priority as they have citywide significance.
 - Suggestion to show the channel parks as planned regional parks instead of parks that are part of this plan.
 - Laney space as public still to be negotiated.
 - Show connection to Estuary Park /crossing embarcadero– a priority for this plan or is it a regional plan?
 - Response: not opposed to calling out what is part of the plan versus what is going to happen as part of other larger processes.
- Section outside of boundary of Area 3 – Victory Court
 - Site 41: opportunity site with community agreement: either take off or identify vision. Without ballpark doesn't make sense to include.

- Response: The area between Oak and Fallon streets – not a priority but could include some transportation improvements.
- JLDA recommends taking it out. 41 is either part of the ballpark or Jack London district plan – asking for trouble to incorporate into this plan.

I-880

- Suggested that in addition to protecting future tenants, the plan should consider how development near the freeway can improve the health and quality of the rest of the neighborhood.
 - Response: New buildings can help buffer the neighborhood from the highway.
- Comments regarding access to Harrison Square Park:
 - What would make improved pedestrian crossings eligible for funding?
 - Noted that bulb-outs and crossings are more project ready because they require less analysis.
- Comments regarding the I-880 undercrossings:
 - Noted that at the last meeting it was pointed out that Jackson Street might be more important than Oak Street for undercrossing. Not sure need to keep Oak Street as a priority since there is currently heavier pedestrian traffic on Madison; Jackson has more problems. Suggest that Webster Street is the most important. Also suggested to make the priority undercrossing where the most pedestrian traffic is (also noted that there is a sense that it is Jackson not Oak Street).
 - In terms of prioritizing, it was suggested that it would be better to include all crossings with basic improvements rather than two fabulous crossings at Oak and Webster.
 - Noted to also keep in mind that Oak takes you directly to BART
 - Noted that there has also been discussion about activities as well – how would they integrate with an art wall?
 - Suggested that the art wall might be better if it is solid all the way back to prevent homeless encampment.
 - What about extension under freeway of activities on either side?
 - Concern that a wall precludes future activities under freeway.
 - Response: An art wall would not be very expensive; could be an interim project and not be a barrier to future development.
 - Talking about phase 2 in terms of activity under the freeway – how feasible is that? Is it desirable? Active uses under the freeway seem unrealistic. A wall is better than what exists there now, but would need to wrap the wall.
 - Suggestion that active uses under the freeway would work if they roll in and out. JLDA is following up on various potential activities in a 5-10 year plan.
 - Cautious about employing a wall where parking exists – could create a safety issue if the wall wraps and you wouldn't be able to see the parking lot.
 - Noted that in San Diego they use areas under freeway as storage spaces, which is a good use of under highway space. Some concern from other members that they don't want storage there because becomes place for criminal activity.
 - Note from staff/consultant that uses could be variable, and don't have to be either/or.

- Noted that the skate park should not be used as an as example since it is illegal and Caltrans is trying to get rid of it.
- Noted that Caltrans gives different answers about the parking lots, but consistently wants to make money on them. Noted that it would be great to get them to come to a meeting.
- Noted the importance of addressing parking – if keep taking away parking where are those people going to park?
 - Response: assume we are replacing – not augmenting.
- Noted that there is a mention of soundwalls and support looking at feasibility as one way of reducing impacts. Suggest work with CTC to explore feasibility of soundwalls. Need more emphasis on soundwall study.
- Noted that recommend not adding a street through peerless coffee (between Oak and Fallon).

BART Blocks

- Discussion on Madison Square Park
 - Clarification on Madison Square Park - mixed opinion on if community center should go on park.
 - People very serious about keeping park as park space – the community has invested personal dollars into the park to maintain it.
 - Businesses in Chinatown think that Madison Square Park is most buildable block and right now is a barrier to the expansion of Chinatown. Would like to see something built on Madison Park.
 - Business community understands importance of park especially for tai chi folks – but Madison Park is more buildable (than the BART blocks) and we want more street vibrancy. That whole block stops that vibrancy. Tai chi folks provide vibrancy until 10:00 but we need round the clock vibrancy.
 - Madison Park business owners – 9th and Jackson – want to increase traffic. The park is only used during limited hours, mostly by homeless people, with limited police protection. From the business owner perspective, they want to see development of business, retail, and housing in order to increase activity in area. Want businesses to bring in activity from BART and to become part of the larger Chinatown area. See the makings of great area – in favor of developing the Park as well as the whole corridor. The park could be replaced by integrating it into development.
 - Owner at 9th and Madison building and is looking for a more balanced approach – have opportunity to make more vibrant neighborhood – think should develop Madison Square Park. In the morning people use it but in the afternoon it is dead. The plan needs a more balanced approach.
 - Concern that if it remains an open park it needs to be staffed with active recreation programs, which will also serve the effect of policing. Hard to do without a building for a recreation center. Might need to be some kind of building – even if just recreation.
 - Noted that it is not true that park is empty in the afternoon, and the Church uses the park during summer.
 - Suggestion that a community center could be located across the street.
- Request for design rational for locating a building between Madison Park and the half-block plaza on the BART Admin Site.

- Response: The building was located on the buildable part of the block. Other half may not be buildable.
- Suggest looking at other locations where they are putting development over station entries.
- Noted that proposing expansion of operation control is what makes it difficult to build over.
- Question regarding the MTC block – does new development there assume that MTC and ABAG move? Also does BART plan to move police above-ground?

Chinatown Core

- Question regarding 7th and 8th streets for two-way conversion – since they are not listed does that mean it's taken off table?
 - Response: No – but expense is such that improvements could be phased (try lane reduction through striping first).
- Is there a way to find out what the traffic impacts are before we make a decision?
 - Response: the assumption is that the recommended changes would be okay within the network.
- Buses (AC Transit): 7th/8th is a major bus couplet. Second only to 11th/12th in this area. Concerned about reducing lanes on 8th street. Chinatown is an area where people use buses a lot and slowing bus traffic is not a good idea. Noted that the capacity analysis doesn't necessarily include buses. Urge group/project to consider how lane reductions impact buses.
- Practical comment on green streets – city has no money to maintain medians etc. Could become an eyesore due to trash etc. Feel bad putting out as beautiful thing then take back because can't afford to maintain.
 - Response: could potentially be a long-term idea especially for maintenance heavy ideas. Could keep in discussion if framed in that context.
 - Think in terms of long term – improvements could be beneficial over long term but may become the responsibility of business owners (business/commercial owners in area may not support it)
- Question about bike lanes – if stop on 8th/9th where would bicyclists go? Need to clarify if no bike lane on 8th/9th would still be a bike route
- For options on 10th Street, clarify what the east/west bus route is.

Upper Chinatown

There were no comments for Upper Chinatown, as the conversation moved directly into heights.

CSG COMMENTS ON OVERARCHING ISSUES

Height

An extensive discussion ensued in response to a draft height and massing concept and maps. Comments included:

- Noted that open space and alleyways also add to the humane setting of Vancouver/Portland.
- Are there different thresholds for seismic requirements when it comes to height regulations and are there cost implications?

- Response: Yes: wood-frame limited to 4-5 stories (up to 60' with a podium base), then different building types above that; next break is approx. 85-90 feet; next break is approx. 12 stories; next break is approx. 22 stories. These types are prevalent in terms of building code.
- What are ratios of open space used in Vancouver/Portland, which also adds to the livability?
- Suggest more discussion on the tower footprint/scale since this has a direct relationship to the type of development. How does the example of Vancouver (with 125' length) relate to block-size?
- Request for more criteria for understanding and discussion before we can make decisions – need more analysis before can give feedback. For instance, need to consider the impact of towers on parking. The higher you go the more units and square feet of development, and more parking required. What is the balance in terms of parking under or in a podium and how does resolve in development? What impact will towers have on the street?
 - Response: 125' limit in Vancouver is on 200' square blocks – less than an acre in size. Different approach because have different scale. Limit is working even though office typologies don't typically want a 125' limit. Used 150' in drawings shown today. Only went two stories below ground-floor. For structural types: breaks by code and by elevators. BART parking lot reduced parking requirement (from 2 to 1 per 1,000 sf)
- Noted that certain voices in community that don't want height limits at all; but height limits are dictated by other things like accommodating parking. Could do more underground parking and more height. Test was artificial in the sense that some people in community want to see no height limit – want to see how high could go with parking feasibly.
- Noted that podium height and impact on urban design/street level is most important. As long as the ground floor is good, okay to allow as much height as parking can allow.
- Another good example is San Diego, where the size of the blocks is similar.
- In connection with parking, what assumptions did you make for parking above ground? To the lot line or assume pedestrian friendly at edge?
- Can be problems with ventilation that need to be considered in how deal with parking.
- Some members of the Chinatown Coalition have agreed that in most areas would like a base podium of 45' and then height up to 8 stories, with CUP above without an actual height limit. There is a feeling that it is unnecessary to have so many zones.
- Question regarding how historic resources are reflected in the height map. The base height is respecting the district near 7th, but not at the Downtown District and King blocks.
- Question about wind acceleration effects – how far do buildings need to set back for wind mitigation? Intuitively 20 feet sounds good, but is there an analysis behind that?
- Suggest that more detail is needed on community benefits –what they are, what triggers them, etc.
- Suggestion to add public art to list of public amenities.
- Suggest that it would be interesting to do analyses of how changing parking requirements would change feasibility of building types.
- Need to consider if setback requirements prohibit development.
- Why do we need a CUP for the tallest height?
 - Response: in order to obtain community benefits.

- Noted that it seems like building in area CT5 would still have impacts and want to get community benefits for those impacts. Support using a CUP to make sure get community benefits.
- One issue around height and density is definition of active store front – need a clear definition for active uses. For instance consider that when we talked about 14th street as an active street – think of Franklin Street where large buildings back on Franklin and kill that pedestrian experience. So need to be sure that not everyone facing 14th Street backs onto other streets.

Parks

- Suggest that rather than demanding a little open space on every parcel, have park network. Should be asking for little parks or mitigation funding?
- Have to deal with issue of how to get open space on every site versus have commercial uses on streets.
- Think of how to require open space on large development sites but don't preclude other creative ideas. Uses can also be complementary to development without being park – for instance could put a rec center on site 14 that would allow Lincoln to move their center.

Affordable Housing

- Can specific plan require affordable housing?
 - Response: Test of political will to add; also question about the fate of the Redevelopment Agency (the City's primary means of assisting affordable housing production)
- Also consider disincentive of higher affordable housing requirements.
- Support unbundling parking.
- Using other strategies? i.e. transfer of development rights?
 - Response: please send other ideas and will have an affordable housing working group.

BART RFQ

- BART has heard loud and clear what people want on the blocks – heard loud and clear to preserve the park; how to activate the park is another question. Need to have high density on other blocks to support community benefits.
- Height levels/areas for the BART parking, BART plaza, and MTC.
- Put out fact-sheet on solicitation of what is envisioned in an RFQ.
- RFQ will help get reality check from private sector and understanding of what the community benefits and tradeoffs are.
- MTC leaving but ABAG has no plans to move.
- Sept 1st at 9:00 am BART board workshop – open to public.
- Decisions are down the road.