

Families Tea

Eleven interested community members with children or grandchildren that use the area or that are involved with Lincoln Elementary School attended the Families Tea Focus Group meeting on April 2, 2011 from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. to discuss their concerns, goals, and vision for the Lake Merritt Station Area. Dyett & Bhatia welcomed the group and City of Oakland staff provided some background information on the Plan. Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN) provided consecutive translation for seven out of nine participants that spoke Cantonese and Mandarin.

The remainder of the meeting was opened to the attendees to discuss issues, goals and their vision for the Planning Area. Guiding questions were provided and the discussion was facilitated by City staff and Dyett & Bhatia. A summary of the feedback received at the meeting follows.

MEETING SUMMARY

Participants introduced themselves and shared where they live and the ages of their children or grandchildren. Two participants were grandparents, and seven were parents, with children ranging from toddlers to young adults in College.

EXPERIENCE OF THE PLANNING AREA

Access

Participants described how they get to and around the area, with the five participants that live in the planning area noting that they primarily walk around the area, while the six participants living outside the planning area primarily access the area by car. One participant noted that her grandmother used to take bus, but since the bus line to Laurel was cut she can't get there as easily. Another family that primarily drives also noted that occasionally the kids will be picked up by their grandmother, who also lives with the family, in which case they will take the bus.

Safety

Consistent among participants were safety concerns about walking in the area. One participant was particularly concerned about security at the BART station and needing to know who to call when they felt unsafe (while there are signs in the station saying to call, no-one responds). They suggested an escort system and regular patrolling both at and around the station. Several participants also identified the area around Madison Square Park and the BART administration block as a safety concern, where they noted that there are many homeless people living and it is dirty and smells bad. One participant that lives near Madison Park noted that her car had been stolen twice from the area.

In response, participants indicated that they avoid walking in that area. One participant noted that she will take a longer route to avoid walking near the Park, or asks her father to drive her around. Another family noted that they drive between Lincoln and Laney for classes because it doesn't feel safe to walk that distance. They noted that they would walk through the planning area only in a large group, like for a field trip. On the other hand, some participants noted enjoying using the park during the summer for their kids to play, but only if it feels safe and is clean.

Destinations/What Brings You to the Planning Area

Most participants indicated that they are in the planning area every day. Participants use the Planning Area for a variety of needs and visit many locations throughout the planning area. Participants described a range of activities, including: running errands, using the senior center, shopping in Chinatown/visiting

Chinatown markets, dropping-off and picking-up kids at Lincoln Elementary School, visiting the doctor or dentist, getting groceries, and visiting Laney for classes (including swimming classes for kids). Some participants also noted that they try to get home before dark due to safety concerns.

Traffic

Participants made several comments related to traffic in the Planning Area and how it often feels unsafe for pedestrians. Participants noted that cars drive too fast, are impatient, and cars often have to swerve around potholes (such as on 10th and 11th streets). They noted that the streets are too wide, but then there are also problems when lanes merge. They also noted that there are a lot of accidents related to traffic trying to get on the freeway.

There was a lot of concern about traffic making it hard to cross streets, particularly crossing 7th Street near the freeway ramps where cars don't give right of way to pedestrians. They noted that cars don't wait at the stoplight because it's one-way, making it unsafe to cross the street. Also, participants were particularly concerned about intersections near Lincoln Elementary where cars turning right don't always wait for children to finish crossing before crossing intersection, or sometimes cut children off so they don't have to wait.

Participants felt that generally both drivers and pedestrians need to follow the rules better. One participant noted that people run stop signs in some places and cause accidents. Another participant noted that there can be problems for drivers where people cross streets mid-block or otherwise against the rules, which makes drivers afraid of hitting people.

On the other hand, people liked the intersections in the heart of Chinatown (with the pedestrian scramble), since it's very clear who has the right of way. They felt it is a smooth intersection for pedestrians and drivers.

Favorite things

When asked what their favorite things are about the Planning Area, participants noted its character as a cultural space, the convenience of amenities and services being nearby, such as groceries, medical center, shopping, eating, and senior services; performances such as dancing at Lincoln; and the great asset of Lincoln Elementary School.

VISION FOR THE PLANNING AREA

Improve Access

Street Improvements

Participants suggested street improvements to make the area nicer to get around. In general they suggested improved lighting and cleanliness. To promote cleanliness they suggested an effective campaign to make people care about the streets – a Keep Oakland Clean Campaign – which would empower the people of Oakland and prevent people from littering and spitting on streets. Also, they suggested putting in more trash cans (at every corner) and adding signs that say “No Litter.”

It was also noted that currently there are no clear walking paths or well lit pedestrian corridors. It was suggested that 10th Street would be a great corridor for walking, biking, and slower traffic, connecting all the way to the Eastlake neighborhood. Participants felt that now you need to drive to get to Eastlake and a good east/west pedestrian and bicycle connection is needed. They also suggested that there is a need for clear pedestrian crossings on major streets, and while some liked the idea of a pedestrian only street, they noted it would be okay if traffic is slower. They suggested that in order to slow traffic, there should be speed bumps to slow traffic approaching busy intersections.

Improved Transit

Participants wanted improved public transit, in particular more bus access – including more stops, routes, and frequency. One participant who currently drives to the area noted that if there was more bus service they would take the bus, but now the service isn't good enough. They also suggested extending free Broadway shuttle all the way to North Oakland where lots of senior housing exists.

Parks and Community Facilities

Parks

Participants noted that they do use the existing parks in the area, including the tennis courts at Laney, and they walk/run around the lake. They also suggested more parks with various activities and amenities, such as more trees, flowers, public restrooms (well-built, like Alameda parks, not temporary), a gazebo, tennis courts, a playground, and BBQ stations like in the parks in Alameda. Participants noted the importance of maintaining the parks and suggested creating a homeless shelter to address their concerns about homeless people living in Madison Square Park, so people would have a better place to live.

Community Facilities

Participants also noted that they would like to have another larger community facility or recreation center since the Lincoln Recreation Center is not big enough. They suggested that such a center be located near the BART station and include another library branch since the Asian library branch is too small and noisy now. They noted a need for separate rooms for different age groups (seniors/adults, children and youth) at the library so there can be a louder room for kids, and a quieter reading space for adults rather than all sharing the same space. They also wanted to see a place to play chess. Participants also suggested more schools in the area. They noted that if people are well educated that solves a lot of problems – makes it easier to get jobs, etc.

Participants also expressed concern, however, about the reality of new amenities in the area. They noted that ideally they do want more recreation space, libraries, etc., but with hours at existing resources being cut they were skeptical that there will be enough resources to support them. While they appreciate the chance to talk about vision they also want to focus on the immediate and practical and more immediate improvements that can address concerns.

Participants agreed that a private/public space developed like in the Pacific Renaissance Plaza is a good thing, but in order to get a developer to invest into community there needs to be good infrastructure in place to attract development, so that they can see that it is a safe area with good potential.

Buildings and Services

Participants wanted to make use of vacant lots with new development that includes parking structures, but that also has other uses like parks, residential units, retail, or a market on top. Participants were supportive of mixed use development with office and business spaces on the first few stories and housing on upper stories, including affordable housing. They also wanted a movie theater for Chinese films in Chinatown.

When asked how tall new buildings could be, participant gave a wide range of answers. Most said 8-12 stories, but one said 18 stories and other couple people said 4-5 or 5-6 stories. One person suggested 10-12 stories with a recreation center and/or playground built in for kids.

PRIORITIES

Participants were asked to share what they thought were the most important changes for the Planning Area. Many participants agreed with each others' recommendations, which included:

- Brand new community/recreation center with good restrooms and separate rooms for different ages – seniors, youth, children.
- A “Promote Healthy Community” campaign, including more signs, logos, and ads about how to build a healthy community and environment and keep community members responsible.
- Street paving for safety reasons. For example there are too many potholes on 12th, which is unsafe because people don’t stay in their lane.
- Improve the transportation system and make pedestrians safe from traffic.
- Add mixed-use buildings with businesses at the ground and housing above, including affordable housing depending on how much the developer can put in.
- Relocate Chinese Garden Park – right now too unsafe to cross 7th to access the park.
- Improved safety, cleanliness, and healthy environment.
- Clean-up Madison Square Park.
- More affordable housing.