

Development Activities Meeting Report (Version: 4/18/2019)

This report created by the Neighborhood Planner and included with staff reports to City Boards and/or Commissions.

| Logistics | Stakeholders |
|---|--|
| Project Name/Address: New Zoning Proposal for North Oakland | Groups Represented (e.g., specific organizations, residents, employees, etc. where this is evident): Oakland Planning and Development Corporation (OPDC) Oakland Business Improvement District (OBID) Bellfield Area Citizens Association (BACA) Area residents and stakeholders City Planning (DCP) staff |
| Parcel Number(s): See web map on the EngagePGH page | |
| Application Number: DCP-MPZC-2024-00596 | |
| Meeting Location: Zoom | |
| Date: Monday September 9, 2024 | |
| Meeting Start Time: 5:30 pm | |
| Presenter: Department of City Planning | Approx. Number of Attendees: 36 |
| Boards and/or Commissions Request(s): Zoning Map amendments require Planning Commission review and recommendation; City Council review and approval for adoption | |

How did the meeting inform the community about the development project?

Ex: Community engagement to-date, location and history of the site, demolition needs, building footprint and overall square footage, uses and activities (particularly on the ground floor), transportation needs and parking proposed, building materials, design, and other aesthetic elements of the project, community uses, amenities and programs.

DCP presentation: Neighborhood planner for Oakland, Christian Umbach, provided an overview of the Oakland Plan, the adopted neighborhood plan which recommends the proposed zoning changes for portions of North Oakland. One of the major themes of the Oakland Plan was to meet future demand for housing and jobs in Oakland and in Pittsburgh. Unfortunately, zoning can be stagnant by its nature unless amended regularly, and much of Pittsburgh’s zoning code has been in place for decades. However, many of our needs, values, and goals (e.g. sustainability, mobility, housing, etc.) as a City have evolved during this time, which is why we are proposing updated zoning for North Oakland. Today, we will be talking about zoning districts that have already been adopted in parts of Central and South Oakland based on recommendations from the Oakland Plan, but we are now proposing they be implemented in new locations in North Oakland. We are presenting a well-developed draft proposal, and are looking to get feedback to make any revisions where needed.

We will be talking about two already adopted zoning districts: Urban Center – Mixed Use (UC-MU) and Urban Center – Employment (UC-E), and mapping these zoning district boundaries and maximum building heights in North Oakland. The geography of implementation is as far south as around Forbes and South Craig, as far north as North Craig, as far east as Neville, and as far west as the edge of Schenley Farms -- occupying a substantial piece of North Oakland. The Oakland Plan’s Land Use Strategy reflects the desired future for land use in Oakland, and is grounded in the plan’s extensive public engagement process. The Land Use Strategy also recommends the maximum building heights for the area and these we used to inform the proposed max building heights in the zoning.

Throughout the planning process, for the majority of North Oakland, we found a mix of uses, scales, and architectural styles in North Oakland. For the proposed area of the UC-MU district, the goal is to provide diversity of affordable housing options for long-term residents, neighborhood amenities, and local businesses and cater to a variety of building scales, styles and uses with active ground floors and walkable streets.

There is another smaller area that that the Land Use Strategy identifies as the Innovation District, or the employment area. The existing use of this site is largely non-residential, industrial/warehouse, and has some larger parcels that have become underutilized. The plan identified this area mostly for employment, because there is limited opportunity for development with large footprints in this area, which is required for most lab space and other research and development uses. The UC-E district is intended allow for more commercial uses to support life sciences, healthcare, and other industries that increase employment.

These zoning districts focus on the design, form, and character of the development. They also allow for performance points, that can provide a variety of community benefits by allowing for some height variances for developers. There will also be a thorough public review process, and many projects of scale will require Planning Commission review.

Specifically, the changes allow for improved form-based site/building standards. 10% of sizable development sites will be required to be dedicated to urban open space. Step-backs and green buffers are required for taller buildings to prevent domineering structures and create greenspace. The performance points, allows for additional height (15ft) in exchange for providing a sustainability feature or a community benefit, such as zero carbon buildings, on-site energy generation, fresh food access, affordable housing, and more.

A brief overview of the existing zoning context was provided. Existing zoning districts include, the Oakland public realm, residential multi-unit, special-planned, and urban industrial districts. As we can see, there is a mix of maximum heights permitted, currently, and some portions have no height limit, but instead have a unit density limit (which typically equates to a max of 12-13 stories).

Now, we can talk about the proposed zoning districts, as mapped in North Oakland. The web map displays the old and proposed zoning districts, and it can be viewed on the Engage page. The UC-MU is proposed to take up a majority of the area, as we want to encourage a variety of land uses. There is also a section along Melwood that is proposed for UC-E. As you can see, these parcels are much larger to allow for the often-larger footprint required for buildings associated with employment. There is still a much larger area designated to residential in the UC-MU.

Max heights may be applied independent of zoning district boundaries, at a block-by-block level. There are two layers of max height standards, including max height without performance points, and the ultimate max heights. There are different floor to floor heights for different types of development. While housing typically has shorter ceilings, traditional office is often slightly taller, and lab space is often even taller floor to floor heights. You can see the existing and proposed max heights for each parcel on the map on the Engage page. The proposal allows for higher heights along the main corridors, like Craig Street, which slopes down as you move further out from these main corridors..

[A hypothetical rendering showing the potential massing of structures built under the new zoning district was shown]. With the maximum performance points awarded, this is an idea of what a 140 ft. structure (9-13 stories) that could be built in the UC-MU district under the proposed zoning. This includes the green space that is accommodated, as well as the step-backs.

An overview of community engagement to date was shared, beginning with initial discussion with Oakland Plan steering committee members in the Spring. We did a lot of our public engagement in August, we are now having our DAM in September. This will go before Planning Commission in October, and then before City Council at a yet-to-be determined date.

If any questions come to you after this meeting, you can submit those through the Engage page (<https://engage.pittsburghpa.gov/oakland/proposed-zoning-north-oakland>), and we will do our best to respond in a timely manner. You can also view the zoning code text, the maps that were shown, and a timeline for this zoning effort.

Input and Responses

| Questions and Comments from Attendees | Responses from Applicants |
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| <p>In the northern section of this corridor, there are a lot of tall buildings that already exist there that are 15+ stories. It sounds like this new zoning would actually make many of these buildings illegal to build now. Can you talk more about how you came up with this 140 ft max height.</p> | <p>The maximum heights were informed by recommendations from the Land Use Strategy, based on extensive public discussion/engagement. The Land Use Strategy recommend developments using bonus points to be as tall as nine-stories (140 ft accommodates a 9-story lab building). This height aligns with most of the existing taller buildings in this area. However, due to the grade change of sites in the area, height can be a dynamic number, which can lead to some buildings appearing taller from certain perspectives. We can also provide access to information on existing building heights that can be helpful for comparisons.</p> |
| <p>I don't want to see Oakland become downtown or Manhattan. I want it to be a human-centered neighborhood. I am concerned about reducing the width of sidewalks. But, with these height allowances, that is what will happen, and the neighborhood will become a less desirable place to live, for education, and to raise a family. I have yet to hear how this attracts young families to the area. Instead, it seems to focus on giving more leeway for more development, high-rises, and rental properties.</p> | <p>One factor of what may be built in Oakland is dictated by the value of the land, due to high desirability, and what developers can feasibly finance, and this is one reason for accommodating larger buildings. If we look at the proposed map, some sections allow taller buildings, but some are also more mid-rise – in the 4 to 5 story range, which overall produces a mix of development types. Regarding the sidewalk space, there are standards to make sure this is maintained and that there is a pleasant pedestrian experience. The new zoning allows for some flexibility with the setbacks for buildings, allowing for some portions where the building closely meets the sidewalk and other portions where there is open space between buildings and the sidewalks.</p> |
| <p>The bonus points system seems to be trading-off very different objectives, e.g. building height with energy efficiency. Lower building heights are good for human urban development, energy efficiency is good for the environment. Both are good criteria; we should strive for both. Not use one to forsake the other.</p> | <p>This question has been addressed by a response on the Engage page and in the presentation, regarding the performance points system.</p> |
| <p>With increasingly hot summers here in Pittsburgh due to climate change, I actually really appreciate when buildings provide shade along the sidewalk to allow for comfortable walking. Step-backs made our sidewalks sunnier and hotter.</p> | <p>When a project goes through the planning commission, a shadow study is required for buildings that are over 65 feet. Additionally, in spaces that don't receive enough shade, this is a reason to encourage street trees to provide additional shading.</p> |
| <p>It's also very sad to see this plan nuke the RM-VH districts, which will soon be vastly improved for denser residential development with the forthcoming elimination of lot size per unit and minimum parking requirements.</p> | <p>There is a separate zoning proposal that DCP is rolling out that will be city-wide and address lot size per unit and parking requirements, but that is a separate initiative. These changes would only apply to existing districts and not these new districts, which utilizes a different set of scale/dimensional standards via step-backs, green buffers, and open space.</p> |

| Questions and Comments from Attendees | Responses from Applicants |
|--|---|
| <p>You have only spoken to the height of the buildings, you did not talk about whether it is residential or commercial.</p> | <p>There is a mix of uses – residential, commercial, office, employment uses are all permitted, and you could see these different uses even within the same building. These are often the type of buildings you would see before zoning became standard practice. This proposal takes some of these historic development practices, and merges them with some newer and improved zoning practices, such as requiring more open green space.</p> |
| <p>I appreciate the care and thought being given to all of this by DCP. We are talking essentially about increasing the population of the neighborhood – higher density and more development. What ideas are going through your group’s mind in regard to public amenities, like parks and other community amenities, that will be provided for this increased population?</p> | <p>There are a lot of great recommendations in the Oakland Plan addressing community amenities, including the need to develop Community Service Hubs within the residential portions of Oakland. There is one proposed for North Oakland on the site of the Herron Hill pumping station. There are more details on EngagePGH, but this hub could include an outdoor open space, indoor space for programming for students and residents. The idea is to create what is called a “third space” for community members of all backgrounds to come together.</p> <p><i>OPDC response:</i> There was a group of architecture and urban planning students who took a look at this area a few years ago, and it struck all of them that there were no open spaces that weren’t parking lots. So we are thinking a lot about how these parking lots can be activated and repurposed to be more responsive to these needs. Part of the zoning changes would make it so that new surface parking lots could not be developed.</p> |

Other Notes

Some resources to view related visuals, project timeline moving ahead, and meeting recording:
<https://engage.pittsburghpa.gov/oakland/proposed-zoning-north-oakland>

Planner completing report: AJ Herzog & Christian Umbach