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Urban and Regional Planners

M E M O R A N D U M

To: Lake Merritt BART Station Plan Community Stakeholders Group (CSG)
From: Leslie Gould
Re: First CSG Meeting, April 29, 2009
Date: July 13, 2010

The first meeting of the Community Stakeholder's Group for the Lake Merritt Station Plan was held on April 29, 2009 from 5:30-7:00 pm at Oakland City Hall. The meeting began with introductions, which included personal descriptions of each member's interest in and experience of the planning area. The introductions revealed a very diverse group in terms of professional interest and person experience. Agencies ranged from the sponsor agencies, including BART, Peralta Community College District, and representatives of the City of Oakland; to local agencies and institutions such as ABAG, the Landmarks Board, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, Alameda County, Laney College, Oakland Unified School District, the Oakland Board of Education, and the Oakland Museum; and community and advocacy groups such as Asian Health Services, the Buddhist Church of Oakland, the Oakland Chinatown Advisory Committee, East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation, Oakland Heritage Alliance, East Bay Asian Youth Center, Central City East Redevelopment District PAC, Chinatown Chamber of Commerce, Asian Pacific Environmental Network, Walk Oakland Bike Oakland, the CIM group, and local business owners.

Several members described multi-generational connections to Chinatown, having grown up in Chinatown, or having family that lives there now. Many described strong connections to the community, resources, and shops that exist there now. Many members work in the area, walk along the lake, and/ or patronize local businesses and so are intimately acquainted with the existing urban pattern, including its treasures and flaws.

Following introductions there was a short presentation that covered the project background, identified issues, and desired outcomes of the project. The final portion of the meeting was an open discussion where members were asked to share the accomplishments they hoped to see in the area by 2020. Members of the group volunteered many suggestions ranging from planning process to broad goals to very specific projects and improvements. The suggestions are summarized below. This is a first look at these topics and will continue to be discussed and developed as the planning process moves forward.

DESIRED ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR THE LAKE MERRITT STATION AREA

Planning Process

- Review and build on exiting plans:
 - What is overlapping? What's new? How to weave together into one plan?
 - Provide summaries of other plans: provide links to key points from other plans as this process moves forward.
 - Consider plans will broader scope, particularly in regard to climate change or greenhouse gas reduction plans that could be leveraged.
 - Take the Revive Chinatown study to the next stage.
 - Work out relationship between this group and what Chinatown groups are currently working on.
- Consider other examples in Oakland:
 - Grand Ave: used to be 6 lanes across, now 4 and has bike lanes. More people use the street now.
 - College Avenue: Good connectivity between neighborhoods on College (i.e. Rockridge, Elmwood). Creates one seamless street.
 - In project area some areas are vacant/ dead area, others are not—need to connect vibrant areas. Also many one way roads—could shrink to two way with bike lanes.

Larger Planning Goals

- Address needs in Chinatown:
 - Need more room for recreation.
 - Need more affordable housing- particularly for families, not just seniors.
 - Need to support local/ small businesses.
- Public Safety
 - Streetscape improvements- make area more pedestrian friendly, add bulb-outs, etc
 - Lighting
 - Address crime to improve safety near the station
- Address traffic issues.

- Preserve and enhance historic resources
 - Provide historic and cultural markers.
 - Update zoning to reflect pockets of historic properties, i.e. FAR lower to preserve typical buildings
 - Provide incentives to fix up and maintain historic buildings
 - Identify historic districts
 - Use existing programs such as the Mills act program, which helps with property taxes
- Promote business development—more businesses will bring more foot traffic and help support existing businesses.
 - In particular, more space for non-profits and small businesses.
 - Need interesting restaurants closer to station
- Need to see practical/ realistic projects that will be accomplished and that will bring vibrancy, intensity, revenue
- Provide additional open space, recreational areas, and community spaces
 - Access to usable open space is particularly important for a high density neighborhood.
 - Multi-use, recreational, and cultural amenities.
- High-rise, mixed use near transit; safety is an issue; connecting nice areas so people will invest in area.
- Create a model community that is a green, healthy and just community:
 - Lower CO₂ through retrofits.
 - Explore funding possibilities in green building, communities, energy—could find incentives especially for transit oriented development.
 - Include opportunities for existing community, local opportunities.
 - Address health issues due to traffic/ air quality Provide job training to those unemployed as a long-term solution, including language skills.
- Tie planning to financing strategies.
- Address the public domain:

- Streets and right-of-ways—do streets need to be as wide as they are?
 - For instance: 10th Street- currently quiet and wide, could narrow and create wider sidewalks or close and create pedestrian street-link to estuary.
- Create strong connections.
- Change perception of area.
- Increase walkability.
- Connect existing resources:
 - Offices.
 - Students (15,000 people).
 - Peralta college district office (500 people).
 - Oakland museum.
 - Kaiser Center suggested as a connector.
 - Laney College.
 - BART.

Site or Project Specific Suggestions

- Important to address the 3 blocks immediately around station, especially the BART building and parking lot.
- Freeway underpasses:
 - Need to be safer and more pedestrian friendly.
 - Art work is interesting but undercrossing is still grim.
 - Needs better lighting—current lighting is only at night and is also needed during the day.
- Extend scrambles.
- Improve timing of lights so drivers don't have to stop as every light (leads to dangerous maneuvers).
- Finish the 12th Street lake project and pedestrian way, including good crossings at 12th Street.

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- Move the library:
 - To the Kaiser convention center.
 - Near BART and well connected to college, as part of cultural center.
- Reconfigure BART parking:
 - Address dead space.
 - Balance with desire by some for more parking in area.
- Need interesting restaurants closer to station
- Youth orchestra, one of many cultural opportunities to tie the area together.
- Oakland Unified School District will break ground in Jan on new educational complex, done in 2013 between 2nd and 4th ave on east 10th street
 - Central administration building in bad condition, possibly unsafe, not effective use of space
 - How could the Oakland school district get new office space and generate revenue?
 - Interest in joint admin building with Peralta or BART, possibly including teacher housing in area
- Consider design of Madison Square Park
 - Currently turns back on church and community.
 - Could be better accessed/ used by community.
 - Currently primarily used by homeless.

OTHER CONCERNS

- Need to discuss impacts of plan on community—particularly on the Chinatown community.
- How do Chinatown groups ensure they have place in advisory groups.
- Are there additional members currently not included that should be?
- Question regarding type of plan
 - Specific plan issue: There is concern among some advocates for Chinatown that they have not found any benefit to Chinatown in developing such a

plan. As such from their perspective it might be better to focus on an area or neighborhood plan

- Funding constraints may guide type of plan
- Could tinker with boundaries and be strategic about what areas are addressed more specifically.
- Remains an open question. There could be varied levels of specificity within the plan. Need to consider the range of possibilities and legal considerations.