



Commissioners Present: Jim Moore and Chris Pattillo

Staff Present: Ed Manasse and Laura Kaminski

Broadway Valdez District Specific Plan, Design Guidelines

Ed Manasse presented a PowerPoint slide show going over the Design Guidelines, Appendix C, of the Specific Plan.

Comments from the public and Commissioners

NAOMI SCHIFF

As you know we don't think that the Waverly residential area become commercial and I did want to just provide some pictures of some very successful retail both in Oakland and in other places that make use of the historic architecture as commercial space or as a mixture of commercial and residential and that includes some of the highest sales tax generating sales tax areas of the city.

I would just like to make a little laundry list of some of other comments. First of all, as far as the sidewalks, again, please no expensive tree grates. Please use gravel or dirt or something around those trees because city does not have the ability to maintain the tree grates, the trees grow and grow into the grates and in ten years you have a problem. And we have examples of this all over the city, it's a waste of money to spend your money on tree grates, don't do it. Spend your money on irrigation and some nice gravel. And there are already many examples of that in the city, so just take a look and it can work.

Again, repeating earlier comments, no banners and avoid gateways. I won't go in detail about that. I would like to make a suggestion about your extent plazas formally known as the plazas of auto row, that's where your bike crowds goes. You shouldn't heavily redesign them, just turn it into a bike nexus in each case and particularly I think there should be a bike lane that gets you from down Webster on to Broadway. It's really is time now, if you are going to encourage bikes to make it safe to ride them. Right now, no bicyclist in his right mind is going to make that sharp right to avoid that Webster cutoff, instead bicyclist will ride through the pedestrian plazas scattering pedestrians upon rivals. So rather than encourage conflicts between pedestrians and bicyclists the thing to do is where you have that extent plazas, make them work for bicycles. I suggest you bring that up at the BPAC. I am no bike designer, but I can tell that we have a problem.

I would just like to address briefly that the city with very good reason has required ground floor retail in every kind of buildings in every place downtown. That's fine except it stays empty and an example is 250 Frank Ogawa Plaza, which has many vacant retail spaces and is owned by the city, surely in a position to offer cheap rent. Therefore, I would like to suggest that there should be more nuanced strategies for ground floor treatment that address how you can make ground floor treatment if you don't have small retail customers. Because it may be hard to get those tenants, especially when we are spreading our retail from Jack London Square to Mont Clair. I feel that this is an unrealistic goal in the short term, although in a long term it might not be a problem. For a short term phase it is a problem.

I would also like to suggest that elsewhere you have talked about moving the auto dealers around. That's a waste of money and waste of energy, leave them where they are. Let them generate sales tax, don't move them it's just waste of effort.

I would also like to say that the idea of chamfered corners is overdone. The city already has already way too many buildings that are making a statement on the corner. Historically, statements on the corners were occasional and many buildings faced the street flat and that's OK. If you have statement in every corner, people will simply get lost and not know which corner they are on. It's fine to have buildings address the streets straight on and I don't think it should be a design standard that every corner has to have a corner entry.

OK I have got couple of points, if you can just bear with me. There is some stuff here about flat roofs. I am extremely concerned about putting funny faced parapets on flat roofs because I have been past the Gilroy Outlet Mall and many malls along 101 and our outlying areas. It's very easy to look completely artificial, phony and badly designed. I hope that you guys have some suggestions. I am not an architect but when parapet is completely artificial shape stuck on a building it is hard to make it actually look good and fit it in the historic context. I am sure we will have some flat roof buildings. In a way I almost see a flat roof building as a flat roof building. It would be interesting to see what else could be done. Maybe you could put parking on the roof as was required in the new Broadway project. I hope somebody will address it.

Under DG-70 there is some remark about family housing. The only family housing that I know of is on Waverley Street and Harrison Street. The general approach to this plan has not been to encourage family housing as far as I can tell. I am curious about where you are planning to put it, if at all.

And then on lighting, there is disconnect between the design guidelines and proposed zoning. I proposed zoning there is a bunch of stuff about its an entertainment zone and I don't know what all, up facing lights and big panels of LEDs. I don't know billboards and screaming racket, I don't know what all it is. But these design guidelines seems very temperate and wonderful and in conflict. I propose that we remove that entertainment overlay all together from the plan and stick with your very reasonable lighting suggestions in the current document we are reviewing today. Thank you.

MICHAEL BECKER

I am commercial manager for auto called Nissan. We are the north end of the Valdez Plan where lot of the changes are going specifically. I have a couple of questions, since we particularly just came into business last few months. But we have made significant investment in that area and for a very long term. Things that are actually affecting us with this Valdez Plan like safer street lights as well. There are no guidelines on there, we have to put lights in but then we have to change this and this going to be an extensive cost. It's one of the largest parts of our tenant's improvement that we would be doing. And also we have signage through our dealer agreement Nissan that we have to put it, do we have to take these down off the board, off the buildings. If it's going to be part of the plan, taking a look at the I have access to here. I also have a question about 27th and Broadway which is referenced for the urban garden. If you are going to design that, that will take away part of our frontage. So my question is, I know we are late in the process, this has been going on for a long time and we have only been here for two months. But is there any way to address these items and also for parking as well.

Commissioner: I would suggest that you meet with staff ASAP.

NAOMI SCHIFF

I am hearing lot of complaints about narrowing of sidewalks due to adding sittings in front of restaurant, particularly, at Broadway and over on Grand Avenue and I think it is important to keep some clearance there. So I would like to say that in treating these sidewalks it's important that people be able to walk there and unfortunately our bicyclists do ride on sidewalks. Again dedicated bike lanes might help that. Legal clearance is only one wheelchair wide and that is actually

not enough especially with tree wells you end up zigzagging. So we should have a wider minimum than the ADA minimum.

COMMISSIONER JIM MOORE

I think the plan has evolved very nicely over number of years through I don't know how many meetings. I would first like to respond to a couple of questions or comments. The Webster bicycle path coming from Rockridge is definitely highly travelled as you get close to Broadway. It is definitely problematic. So it does make sense of that and I am sure it will come up in upcoming meetings. I thought that made lot of sense. I have a quick question for Mr. Manasse, if I remember right that Commercial Corridor Design Guidelines that just went through, is that actually what the new project would be confirming to.

ED MANASSE

Well the guidelines for Commercial Corridor include Broadway, so these guidelines for the plan will be in addition to those guidelines and if there is any conflict between the two the Broadway Guidelines will supersede. But they are intended to be complimentary to each other.

So if I could just address couple of Michael's comments. First, the plan and guidelines will only apply to new applications going forward. Anything that is in the district now is essentially grandfathered in. When a city or private property owner or a developer is making new improvements or new investments in the area that's when these guidelines in the plan would come into effect.

COMMISSIONER JIM MOORE

I was mostly concerned with the sidewalk in other parts of town like Fremont Ave like College Avenue have very tight pedestrian path. Especially where there is a tree well or bicycle rack, there is a bus stop or things like that, that end up really making it narrow. Plan goes a long way in addressing that, in theory and in principle. And when there would be a large project , but small infill we should look ahead a little bit and take advantage of little bit aggregate collection of store fronts that may be they have relief from zero setback and try to create wider sidewalks. I think this is fairly the intent of the plan, but it will be challenging in some parts of the area. Also, one thing I am little bit concerned with is in long term that the plan does circle back with and coordinate with the other plans. Whatever other plans that apply with projects. So there is some clarity to people who are applying to projects so that they can navigate through this without it becoming burdensome and bureaucratic thing, I think it can be done elegantly and simply, and I am pretty sure that this is the stated intention of the plan and I am confident that will be the case. I would like to point out that this is a long term vision, its goal that will be set in place in plan and this would happen over long period of time in small incremental ways. So, it's a challenge how to make all of the stated goals actually happen. Public areas, improved parking and crossings at intersections. If we have a mechanism to collect traffic impact fee so whatever it is so we have a way to help city figure out how to. Not everything can be done in the private sector, a lot of this public realm that the plan clearly addresses. But how that happens in a meaningful way over time so that we end up with a plan that makes sense is going to be a big challenge. The actual design guidelines the way building by building it's addressed, I believe that it has evolved in a meaningful way that I am very supportive of. I don't believe that it is actually asking for flat roof, I think there was some attention to some design articulation from building to building with exception of rooftop garden or sustainable roofs for those tenants that want to be flat. I definitely agree that from a design stand point that flat roofs are not necessarily the enemies, but we need to pay attention.

COMMISSIONER CHRIS PATTILLO

I have several small comments, similar to what you have made. Overall, I think the guidelines are very strong and very clear which is helpful. I will just run through these:

On design guidelines 6 we are talking about how to treat the architecture along I-580. And I would like to add to the guidelines that ask developer to really think about how buildings look from I-580, from the freeway. A good example is Market Hall that I drive by from my way home and I always enjoy the roofline of that building. That's how I experience Market Hall more than any other. So, it is an important factor to consider.

One of the things that staff has heard me say before and I will keep saying that. The person who write these guidelines doesn't seem to understand what the word landscaping means. I am a landscape architect, and landscape architecture involves really everything as soon as you walk out of the door, including a paving, a fencing, plantings and irrigation. The word landscaping is not a synonym for planting and I personally find it very confusing. In almost every case and I actually read every one of them, when the word landscaping is used in these guidelines, they really mean planting. So, I really think we should use the word planting.

The image of bike parking on page C-11 in my mind is not an example of attractive. I think the point that we are making is that it should be attractive and if we can find a better visual for that that would be good.

On page C-13, design guideline 40 there is some minor miss numbers with building heights that are described in zoning. Just need to look in what is in the zoning section and I think and make sure they jibe with Appendix C.

Design guidelines 61, the last sentence I don't understand. The only sentence in whole set of guidelines that I didn't understand. The point they were trying to make was that design guidelines 62 suggest that a blank façade of 100' would actually be OK. If I am reading it correctly, not encourages. If I am looking at this room, its about 60 or 70' long, so imagine the length of this room 1 ½ times a blank façade and that just seems way too long. So, I think we should relook at design guidelines 62.

Design guidelines 70 & 71 relates to creating family friendly. I guess my only question is similar to one of the comments Mr. Moore made, how do we actually make that happen. We hear a lot of speakers talking about wanting to have a variety of housing types. So it's good that it is in there, but we need to think about how to actually make it happen.

Design guidelines 86 is about green roof and this is one of my issues. I think generally the focus on sustainable design that has gained great deal of attention in recent years is all really good. But I am recurring concerned about sort of the practicality about how we apply sustainability. Currently, there seems to be lot of money available to do storm water treatment and in Seattle it makes a lot of sense to spend money on infrastructure on storm water mitigation, but in Oakland it nearly doesn't make that much of a sense. By comparison, the guidelines are advocating the use of solar cells which would create a growing environment where our street trees could actually thrive, that Oakland is in desperate need of. So, at some point and I hope not in distant future. I hope we will take a fresh look at all our practices of sustainability, and I bring this up with green roofs. I mean green roof, for making them thrive have to be irrigated. I mean, how practical is that, not really.

And just my last point on this just as an example, just about any project that is being developed and built in this day and age has to comply with LEED or greenness, and the goal is to get points. And often we designers include features so that we get the points, does it matter if it makes sense or if it is truly sustainable, but we get the point. So, at some point we have to re-examine all of these things.

My next comment, I think Schiff touched on this, I continue to ask myself something about why are we legislating good design. I almost feel that we can take all of these pages and take directives to professional design. Everything here is just

common sense, it's just plain good design. I guess because I am a design professional, it irks me that it has to be legislated. Similar to that and I have said this before as well. Much of which is in here, really should apply citywide. It's just good common sense, and I have this problem that we are producing more and more and more sets of design guidelines, and if we have to have them let's just have one set of design guidelines. One document that we can refer everybody to. I know Mr. Manasse's response to this is that ultimately that is the goal. But in the meantime the repetition that we are going through, it's a bit insane in my mind.

Design guideline 123 & 124 is about new buildings being deferential to historic buildings. I absolutely love that, my favorite part. And everything in design guideline 123 & 124 is excellent.

Section 3.1.3 we are talking about site furnishings and I looked very carefully for the phrase "high quality." It took a long time and doesn't occur until you get to design guideline 225, so I think we need to incorporate high quality. Just to give you an example, if you walk to Frank Ogawa Plaza, we have plastic chairs that come from Wal-Mart, and then you walk across the street to City Center and you see a variety of really colorful and playful nicely designed and well-made site furnishings and the contrast is profound. So we need to move in that direction.

Design guideline 154 and also 3.1.8, there are multiple guidelines with regards to news rack. I am not sure if we will need that for much longer. I guess they have to stay there for now. I look forward to the day when that piece of street clutter no longer exists and I think we are close.

Design guideline 169 about bus stop, I would like to add the word transparency. The visual that you have provided is perfect.

Design guideline 178 I think we have two standards for trash cans. Some of them are green and metal and really nice, and we also have these new compacting trash cans, that visually might be a little bit better. But the concept self-compacting solar powered trash containers is really good and I was wondering if we can customize with City of Oakland Logo and make them as city standard.

Design guidelines 182 & 223 have to do with the light pollution. Ms. Schiff is right that the person who wrote the design guidelines is different from the one who wrote the plan as they don't jive at all. I do though disagree with Ms. Schiff and I support waving the limitation. I like lots of light. So, we disagree there.

OK 3.1.11 is all about street trees and I believe that the city has a policy that does not allow tree grates. So this might be an example of one city department not listening to other city department. I don't feel as strongly as Ms. Schiff whether or not they should be prohibited. But I definitely want everybody be on the same page within the city. If we do allow tree grates, Ms. Schiff is absolutely right that they do need to be maintained.

Design guideline 194 everything in it is wrong. The city does not allow root barriers anymore and they shouldn't. They damage trees. There is no such thing as a deep rooted tree that is a fantasy that people think is true. The truth is that for all trees, no matter the species, 95% of all the roots are within top 3 feet of the soil and really the bulk is within top 12 inch. So this notion of deep rooted trees doesn't exist. And other thing here you are referring to structural soil, whereas in report itself we talk about silva soil. These are two different concepts for creating a healthy growth. Structural soil has been around for a while and there is no evidence that it works. So, we have moved on to silva soil so it should be coordinated with that.

And my final comment design guideline 195 suggests using deciduous trees, which I don't disagree, but I hope your intent is not to preclude the use of evergreen trees. And I said in the last planning commission meeting as we talked that we will need at some point a master tree planting plan to go along with that and that would define where we use deciduous, where we use evergreen and etc.

ED MANASSE

I would like to address some of the comments. Addressing the comment from Mr. Moore, we do need to figure out how we would pay for all of this. We have number of options that are in the plan. But all of them require either Council action or Community Action following plan adoption. So this is more of an end of the beginning more than anything. When we adopt the plan we have to maintain and continuously update aspects of it for years to come.