

Part I – Neighborhood Character

Presentation

- Key themes from focus group in Jan
 - Size isn't the only issue, also materials, scale, proportion
 - Formula driven development – maxing out the SF instead of putting money toward exterior improvements
 - Out of town developers that are less familiar with the character of the neighborhood
- Three points that we will walk through –
 - Legalize ADU's
 - Create conservation overlay “starter kit” for neighborhoods
 - Create character home incentive program to encourage saving older buildings (that aren't necessarily historic)
- ADU's were the top missing middle housing type identified
- Contextualizing SU/TU zoning – make the formula more contextual, so the zoning doesn't spit out the same results in different contexts. This can be handled by the conservation overlay “starter kit”
- Existing exemptions augment the actual SF and lot coverage
- Many of the neighborhoods, particularly in the East area, coverage tends to be lowered than what is allowed.
- In other areas, building size is out of character if built to the maximum allowed under existing standards
- Additionally, the current zoning tends to produce very long side walls.
 - Another related issue is that if houses are built to the maximum extent allowed under zoning, it doesn't leave much room for landscaping or other solutions for privacy.
- A third issue is that bulk plane and standards allow for what is essentially a third floor that isn't tucked into the roof, as was traditional
 - Potential solutions – drop the bulk plane a bit so it encourages shorter height, or pitched roof. (with some exceptions for encroachments by dormers, etc.)
- Solutions, generally:
 - Look at the exemptions to lot coverage
 - Look at sidewall articulation requirements
 - Modify bulk plane to control scale
- Character home program
 - Density bonuses near transit (additional unit allowed in SU or TU)
 - Allow more SF or coverage (if you save a house and choose to add on instead of demolishing)

- QUESTION – How do the numbers compare in terms of return on development for a new build vs. an addition to an existing building?
 - Cheney – Haven't run those particular numbers yet

Discussion

- Is this essentially area-wide rezoning?
- Cheney- No, it's meant to augment zoning in particular neighborhoods or areas of neighborhoods who want to get a head start on conservation-lite type regulations without needed to get into the whole process of designated a unique conservation district. These tools could sit as a sort of overlay opt-in zone that would be available to neighborhoods who desire it. Also, this would apply to non Historic neighborhoods
- Buzz – The problem of bad design is area-wide, can these tools apply anywhere?
- Cheney – Yes, these tools could be available to the whole area to opt in to, if these tools don't care of the issues adequately, the next step could be a formal conservation district.
- Buzz- what's the new side yard you are recommending?
- Cheney/Dick – something variable, that would allow more of a setback on one side, and less of a setback on the other side. This is more in line with what was traditional anyway. Maybe 5' on one side and more on the other
- Q- these tools would definitely help, to reduce scale without fully blocking modern architecture. We should try thinking about what loopholes there could still be (play devil's architect) and see if there would still be bad work around that would result in bad architecture,
- Dick - Another issue is that while the Denver Hill is the typical form in many neighborhoods, people scrape that hill out so that they get more volume out of the site since the bulk plane stays the same. That's an example of people taking advantage of the rules. But limiting the height of a flat roof to 25' would go a long way to keeping the form to a more reasonable scale. If they want to go higher.
- The bulk plane also seems to produce a wedding cake kind of form, as people step with the bulk plane to maximize volume underneath the bulk plane
- Cheney –maybe the bulk plane is the issue, maybe it's not the right tool to be using to address scale.
- Dick – incentivizing additions to existing buildings rather than encouraging scrape and rebuild, may also help
- There are other influencing factors that come into play when you talk about measuring height from the base plane, such as floodplain regs, etc. But there is a reality that today's preference for homes is towards higher ceilings, which the traditional architecture doesn't offer. That's also what's driving the larger scale, taller buildings (it's not just that people want to max out the bulk plane for the sake of profit, it's also what people tend to like)

- A related point – Denver Square house types aren't being lost as frequently as other forms such as one and a half story and smaller forms – bungalow, craftsman, etc.
- Asbestos and remediation costs are necessary, whether you are demo'ing or add'ing. So that's not an argument for why you can't rehab a place instead of just scraping it.
- People prefer a large four-square over a similarly sized modern building. One of the reasons is the materials, articulation, detailing.
- Buzz- as the neighborhood transitions to the newer forms (flat roof) that are more boxy, they can become a more accepted part of the neighborhood. But one thing that tends to help is the use of higher quality materials (Cherry Creek) . In those situations, the flat roof becomes less of an issue if you detail it in a more thoughtful way that fits more with the character of the neighborhood.
- Good examples of flat roof forms (in Potter-Highlands, in Curtis Park) tend to occur in neighborhoods where they ere required to use good design.
- The 3-story "wedding cake" look is a natural product of the bulk plane, as people try to max out that form. You're kind of incentivizing it because if someone chooses to do a pitched roof, they are intentionally choosing to build a lower volume than what they could if they chose to do a flat roof in that same bulk plane.
- Curt – we want to emphasize that where we are talking about allowing some density incentives is along transit corridors (Colorado, Colfax, for example.) Applies more strongly in Congress Park, in City Park West, and more in East Colfax. Applies to Single Unit zones in these areas.
- What are potential incentives that could be provided for areas where this density bonus wouldn't be offered? (Areas that already allow two units)
- The key here is you give the density, but keep the character. I.e., if you just upzone to get the density you want, then you just get scrapes and new builds of MF
- One issue in the current code is that some of the houses that have been split into multi-units, has to stay that way. Any major improvements or change of use results in a need to be compliance with the existing zoning designation (this means that a large house that's been converted into multiple units now has to revert to it's single family use and requirements) Which is an issue that definitely discourages the reuse and improvement of an existing building. People re more likely to just scrape it and build a new single family home which is what we are trying to avoid.
- We're already talking about changing the rules for the similar situation for commercial buildings along Colfax where there are issues if you try to change the use of a commercial building, you then are kicked into the need to become compliant with existing rules of code for site and building. Change of use requirements. If we're talking about getting rid of that situation for commercial redevelopment, maybe we should also talk about doing it for residential.

Part II – Colfax Character

Presentation

- Majority of lots on Colfax are challenged by size constraints. Redev tends to occur on large lots, or where land assembly can occur.
- So while the actual entitlement may allow for 4, 6 or 8 stories (or even more) it's unusual to see new development approach that entitlement because the lots are so small.
- An additional constraint is the adjacencies to protected districts. Because lots are so shallow off of Colfax, it's difficult to be able to accommodate the setbacks required by the protected districts when you have a lot that's only 75' deep (for example)
- What our market analysis is telling us is that density incentives may not be that effective because developers often aren't maxing out the density they are already allowed. SO if we do offer incentives for density, we need to direct them carefully (special nodes)
- A key idea – treat Colfax as a neighborhood serving corridor rather than an auto corridor. Begin to think of Colfax as more of a nodal collection.
- Minimum height requirements might be something to think of. Also, requiring residential on the ground floor in certain areas (not all areas, because it's not appropriate everywhere)
- We could eliminate drive through's IF we amend the rules prohibiting drive through limits that are present for light rail, and say that improved transit stations would also qualify for this prohibition (that would include BRT stations)
- Incentivize small commercial development and improvement by establishing the ombudsman idea that could help guide smaller developers through process.
- Eliminating or reducing parking requirements in some instances (older buildings, smaller lots). Manage existing parking more efficiently with a parking district(s)
- Cultural district or historic district might be a good idea for certain sections of Colfax. TDR could be an option as well for certain important buildings (recipient sites would be identified along the corridor in the node areas identified... but you couldn't take these development rights anywhere in the city.
- Creating a developer's guide for small projects.

Discussion

- Would TDR result in towers along Colfax – short answer, no. Receiving sites would be fairly limited in location (to nodes) and also we are more talking

about perhaps 3 story zone allowed to go up to 5, and 5 zone going up to 8 stories.

- This program has fairly limited implications because TDR is not an easy program to go through as a developer.
- The point of this incentive though is that it protects certain resources, not that this is meant to serve the goal of increasing density.
- The other big point is that the market may not be there for an eight story building, or ten story building (BUT in the future it might. You could sell the TDR if you own a particular resource, and a buyer could buy them and then hang on to them for a while as the developer for future use.
- The reason we're talking about incentives that could be applied to nodes, rather than actually upzoning sites in nodes, is because what we don't want is the land values to skyrocket, that would be antithetical to the point of trying to preserve key historic buildings.
- The small scale development diagram that shows why it's ridiculous to have eight story zoning on some of the really shallow lots on Colfax where you would never really be able to get that height because of setback and size constraints. In this situation, the TDR would actually be a attractive incentive, because say you're a one story building, and theoretically you have an additional 7 stories of development that you could sell, even though you couldn't actually ever build it on your own site.
- Encouraged by the fact that many of these changes and incentives are zoning based (hard enforceable, instead of soft policy)
- Design guidelines and such could apply through conservation districts and pattern books, etc.
- There will also be sign standards specific to the Colfax corridor.
- We should put some particular focus on how to encourage redevelopment or improvements on small lots that are very constrained. The ombudsman, pattern book sort of strategy could be an important set of tools that would really help out small developers and such.
- What about incentives for architectural types, or guidelines for transitions to residential – one reason for this would be to encourage visual or physical connections between the neighborhood and the hard Colfax corridor edge, this sometimes results in an alleyway that is kind of ignored. It's great that commercial faces Colfax but it means that buildings often turn their back to the neighborhood. It would be better if buildings also had back entrances or side entrances (side streets turning the corner). There could be options for putting small businesses on the alleyway to activate those spaces a bit more, or perhaps in some cases maybe vacation of ROW so that the alleyway becomes usable space. (PRESS ALLEY is an example from Ithaca, same with Dairy Block in Denver). Humble Pie and Cerebral Brewing are an example where of how you can leave the rear of humble pie and move through the alley right to the brewery? Or at least this is an example of commercial turning the corridor

- Existing code discourages residential and commercial utilizing the same alleyway, although this occurs in many places organically, and it was this way historically as well.
- Limit drive throughs in East Area as well. (General agreement in the group) It really disrupts the streetscape. ALSO, the drive through chains also tend to occupy the largest lots because they need the space for the drive thru, but these are the places where there is the greatest opportunity for larger redevelopment, and the density people want to see.
- In the TOD overlay, parking maximums would be identified, and leave it up to the developer how much they want to provide based on market demand. (this is our draft recommendation, but any reduction in parking requirements is controversial in the steering committee for this project, and it has to still be accepted by the steering committee before this actually becomes change)
- Cherry Creek North had some similar issues where people realized that on constrained lots, the parking minimums were just way too high. But through studies it was shown that those parking requirements were not feasible financially or physically with lot constraints, so the city lowered the requirements (if it worked there it can work here?)
- There are other options that we can propose that would maybe alleviate people's concerns about providing less parking (developers or employers can offer bus passes, uber passes, spaces for car share etc. etc. essentially you could do a TDM plan in lieu of some parking (which is common of course))
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