

# Commercial/Imperial Corridor Master Plan



City of San Diego

## *Project Working Group Meeting #1*

*May 18, 2011 – 5:00-7:30pm*

*Sherman Heights Community Center*

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### *Meeting Objectives*

- Review the project and planning process.
- Brainstorm issues and vision for the corridor.
- Brainstorm community workshop format and agenda.

### *Meeting Summary*

#### **1. Welcome and Introduction of Consulting Team and Staff**

Karen Bucey (City of San Diego) welcomed participants to the meeting and asked committee members to introduce themselves and their affiliation, as appropriate. Councilmember David Alvarez thanked Working Group members for their participation and asked them to look beyond the status quo and consider what the community could be.

#### **2. Introduction of Project Working Group**

Rajeev Bhatia (Dyett & Bhatia) explained the role of the working group to provide leadership and input in the planning process. He described that decision making during meetings will be conducted through consensus process, wherein the group will decide to agree on recommendations collectively. He defined ground rules for discussions, which include listening, respecting others' opinions, and allowing everyone a chance to speak. If members would like to share information, they are asked to provide documents or comments to Karen Bucey at least one week in advance of a meeting.

#### **3. Master Plan Process**

Mr. Bhatia and Jean Eisberg (Dyett & Bhatia) provided an overview of the project, including the project location, background, objectives, scope, schedule, and public outreach program.

#### **4. Brainstorm on Corridor Vision and Key Issues**

Working Group members provided their vision for the future of the Commercial/Imperial corridor, concerns, and considerations. These ideas have been synthesized into the categories below:

##### **A. Corridor Character and Identity**

- Overall Character: Working Group members were in general agreement that as the corridor changes in the future, the affordability and diversity of the area needs to be

preserved, and that the corridor (especially Imperial Avenue) continues to provide opportunities for small businesses to remain. Members saw the corridor improving in the future with strategic mixed-use development, improvements to streetscapes and pedestrian comfort and safety, while celebrating and maintaining the corridor's working-class, African American and Hispanic roots.

- Historic Character/Preservation: Working Group members want to consider ways to adaptively reuse historic buildings, many of which are in disrepair. They would like to celebrate the area's history as the historic old East End, an accepting neighborhood for everyone including new immigrants and African Americans returning from the civil war. Working Group members want to reinvest in the corridor's existing resources to enhance what is already available, while ensuring that any renovation or new development fits in with the existing character.
- Building Heights: Several Working Group members felt that three to four stories was an appropriate maximum building height to avoid impacts on sun access or views, and not create a "wall" that divides neighborhoods to the north and south. Some group members felt that five stories or higher was acceptable along Commercial Street or Imperial Avenue and would be more attractive to developers/investors and allow the desired uses (described below) to be realized. Taller building heights can step back upper floors to avoid building shadow impacts.
- Construction Disruption/Relocation: Working Group members want to avoid disruption to existing businesses and consider a program to relocate existing businesses if allowable uses change.

## **B. Land Use and Mix**

- Overall Land Use: A clear majority of Working Group members would like to see a mix of compatible uses along the corridor. Although members were overwhelming supportive of new uses and a more vibrant corridor, they are at the same time concerned about displacement, increase in rents, and potential divisions in the community between rich and poor.
- Mixed-Use Development: Group members are in favor of appropriately scaled and located mixed-use development along the corridor. This would allow residents to enjoy a vibrant neighborhood with a range of uses and amenities and business owners to run shops on the ground floor and potentially live in housing units in the upper stories.
- Businesses: Group members would like to see well-paying jobs in the corridor so that local residents can afford to enjoy these envisioned amenities. This could be achieved by attracting union jobs and retaining manufacturing uses and small businesses. In terms of land use compatibility, landscaping and setback standards can help transition between industrial and residential uses in the various industrial zoning districts.
- Retail: A majority of Group members prefer small neighborhood-serving businesses over "big box" stores. Participants would like to see more healthy food options and a supermarket or co-op market and a reduction in the number of liquor stores. Live music, restaurants, entertainment, outdoor seating, and bookstores could make the corridor a real

destination. On the other hand, participants recognized that more upscale shops may not be affordable for low-income residents.

- Housing: Working Group members would like to see affordable or mixed income housing in the corridor. Some members expressed concern about the loss of open space in condo developments and would like to see yards maintained.
- Education: Several Group members mentioned locating education facilities in the corridor, including a high school, technical school, partnerships with the community college system, and/or job training programs to ensure that residents are qualified for well-paying jobs.
- Junkyards/Recycling Facilities: Group members had mixed opinions about the future of junkyards. While many of the group would like to see them move out of the corridor, some saw benefits and potential for improvement: these businesses provide jobs to the community; some low-income residents collect and drop-off recycled materials at these locations to earn extra money; and there may be opportunities to attract more green industries, such as wind turbine and solar panel businesses.
- Arts & Culture: Several Working Group members expressed a desire to see entertainment and arts uses in the corridor; others agreed, but cautioned against the corridor becoming another Gaslamp District party scene. Group members expressed interest in restoring an old historic theater on Imperial Avenue, providing live/work spaces for artists, building on the art project at 25<sup>th</sup> Street and Commercial Street to incorporate more art in the corridor, and developing a museum to document the history of this community.
- Development Opportunity Sites: Several Group members acknowledged that the intersection of 25<sup>th</sup> Street and Commercial Street creates a “node” or center because of the trolley stop, connections to Balboa Park to the north, the Bay to the southwest, and the location of the police station and community services building. On both sides of this location, two triangles are formed by the intersections of Commercial, Cesar Chavez, and Irving and Commercial, Ocean View, and Dewey, respectively. This can become a center for the community, a gathering space for a farmers market or open air market where people can come together.

### **C. Environment**

Working group members are concerned about potential pollution and noise impacts from the industrial uses and junkyards. Others would like to see the data on these impacts to assess its extent. Group members would like to see mitigations for noise incorporated into future buildings, acknowledging that older homes tend not to be well insulated from noise. Group members would like to see sustainability initiatives in the plan including: green architecture, LEED for neighborhoods, compact development, organic foods, and urban agriculture.

### **D. Market Demand and Financing**

Working Group members mentioned several financing strategies for community facilities and to attract private investment including: reinvesting taxes in the corridor (e.g. parking fees, property assessments), land trusts and affordable housing trusts, redevelopment, and

incorporating retail and other uses at the trolley stops. They questioned if there is a market for: (1) the desired uses described above, given the prevalence of low income households in the area, and (2) residential and live/work units given the existing supply downtown.

### **E. Transportation and Traffic**

- Pedestrians/Bicycles: Community members tend to walk long distances in this corridor and Working Group members described wanting the streets in this corridor to be walkable and safe for pedestrians and bicyclists by: improving sidewalks; undergrounding utility lines and boxes; adding more street lighting; incorporating the existing alleys into the pedestrian network; and ensuring that streets are designed to prevent conflicts between transportation modes (e.g. pedestrians/bicyclists and trolleys/cars).
- Roadways: Group members expressed concern about a proposal to widen these streets. Instead some participants favored installing one-way traffic on Commercial and Imperial (i.e., a couplet) or reducing travel speeds/instituting traffic calming measures.
- Public Transit: Group members would like to see the trolley line used to its fullest extent, with real stations that have active uses (e.g. retail shops) and parking, as well as upgraded trains and platforms that allow for at-grade boarding. However, some participants questioned the ridership at the 28th Street and would like to see more stops within the planning area and lower fares for low-income people. They stated that although east-west transit is convenient, north-south routes are limited and should be improved to better connect neighborhoods to the north and south.
- Parking: Group members appreciate that parking is free and ample, but at least one participant said that parking has become an issue lately during events and games at Petco Park when drivers seek free parking in the planning area. Others felt that this could be a benefit if people visit local businesses while they are in the neighborhood (e.g. have dinner before the game).

### **F. Parks, Public Facilities, and Streetscapes**

Working Group members would like to see more green spaces in the community: placitas (plazas) to gather and rest at key locations (e.g. 25<sup>th</sup> & Commercial); linear parks or landscaping improvements to the median of Imperial or along Commercial; community gardens; green roofs, and landscape setbacks in front of buildings. They would also like to see street lighting installed to ensure safety at night. Participants acknowledged that there are already many great open space and recreation facilities in and around the planning area, but they are not always well utilized or publicized (e.g. joint use facility at Sherman Elementary, Chicano Park, Grant Hill Park). They would like to see community members take ownership of these existing open spaces, but acknowledged that improving connections between public facilities, regional parks and trails, and neighborhoods would help. At least one participant would like to see Commercial Street or Imperial Avenue become a car-free promenade. As described in the Land Use section above, Group members expressed interest in education, arts, and cultural facilities in the corridor. Participants also mentioned installing wireless internet access in the neighborhood, specifically in multi-family developments.

## **G. Planning Process**

Many Working Group Members are currently or have previously participated in other planning efforts in the Southeastern community that resulted in good plans. They are ready to take the next step of implementation. At least one participant does not trust the process, wants to ensure that there will be no eminent domain. Some participants would like certain uses or businesses to be grandfathered, so that they can be allowed to continue, should certain use or other regulations change.

## **5. Community Workshop Format and Agenda**

Mr. Bhatia reviewed the schedule for the upcoming community outreach activities. Working Group members provided ideas about how best to publicize workshops:

- Flyers: Group Members suggested knocking on doors and passing out flyers after church service, at local Police meetings, to friends, neighborhoods, and other contacts. Community organizers can assist in handing out flyers.
- Information/Signage: At least two participants were willing to occasionally place signs in front of their businesses and events (e.g. upcoming soapbox derby). Another participant suggested providing a place where community members can access project information, ask questions and provide feedback (e.g. through comment cards). [Lara Gates (City of San Diego) explained that project resources will be available on the project website and at the Logan Library.]
- Internet/Radio: Group Members suggested listing meetings on the Community Center's website, creating a Facebook page, and providing coverage on the radio.
- Noticing: Group Members suggested expanding the meeting noticing radius beyond ¼-mile from the planning area (to ½- or one-mile), since this corridor is part of a large neighborhood, with many people passing through on their way to nearby destinations. Ensure that the Bronze Triangle neighborhood is notified.
- Workshop Format: Group Members felt that workshops should be a maximum of two hours to make sure that community members are able to attend. Start time of 9am or 10am is appropriate for Saturdays. Workshops should be limited to just a few activities/concepts (i.e. fewer concepts spread across more meetings), so that new information is manageable for participants who are new to community planning efforts.

Group Members asked whether community members would be allowed to hire outside lobbyists to come to the workshops to represent them. City staff responded that they would research the issue and respond at the next meeting. Ms. Gates stated the staff would send Working Group members the schedule for all the public outreach activities and the web address for the project website:

<http://www.sandiego.gov/planning/community/profiles/southeasternsd/>

The City will send notices out to the planning area and surrounded neighborhoods in advance of each community workshop. Staff will provide bilingual flyers for workshops so that Working Group members can publicize these activities to their networks.

## **6. Public Comments/Announcements**

All American Soap Box Derby| Saturday, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011

The Local Race will be held in the neighborhood of Sherman Heights on 25th Street, between Imperial Avenue and Market Street.

Race Schedule:

7:30 to 9:00am | Track Set-Up and Sign-In

7:30 to 9:30am | Weigh-In and Inspection

9:30am | Opening Ceremonies

10:00am | Racing Begins

### CAR BUILDING WORKSHOPS

Car building workshops will be held every Saturday starting February 2011 until May 2011, from 10am—2pm, at Pazzaz: 1913 Euclid Avenue, San Diego, CA 92105

## **7. Conclusion and Next Steps**

Working group members were asked to contact their networks to publicize Community Workshop #1: Saturday, June 25, 2011 at the Sherman Heights Community Center. 9 am – Noon.

The next Working Group Meeting #2 will be held Wednesday, July 20, 2011, 5pm to 7:30 pm at the Sherman Heights Community Center.

## **8. Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 7:30pm.