

Planning and Sustainability Commissioners:

I would like to write in support of the Central City 2035 West Quadrant Plan specifically with respect to Old Town Chinatown. I serve as the co-chair of the Land Use Committee as part of the Old Town Chinatown Community Association and as a Stakeholder Advisory Committee member for the West Quadrant. Old Town Chinatown “is a neighborhood on the brink of great progress”. This is the statement that we have been hearing for over 2 decades and stands out in the introduction to this new 5-Year Action Plan and the motivation for the set aside of \$57 million dollars in urban renewal funds for neighborhood investment. And while we have had incredible successes in parts of the district, we have not been able to sustain the economic momentum and continue the successful revitalization of the entire district.

In the final draft of the West Quadrant Plan, we have outlined district goals, plans and actions that will help ensure that we keep moving forward with positive economic development for Old Town Chinatown. But we would like to take this opportunity to identify some key areas that need some more consideration.

1. There has been much discussion of looking at height adjustments in the district as a tool or incentive for new development. In 2008, this discussion focused on opportunity sites in the National Register Landmark District, the Skidmore Old Town historic district. Today there is agreement that height should remain at the current 75’ in this historic district. The final draft plan discusses studying additional height up to 175’ in the New Chinatown Japantown historic district on the 3 blocks between West Burnside and NW Glisan, and between NW 4<sup>th</sup> and NW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenues. We feel that this is too much height and covers too many blocks. Within these 3 blocks, there are only two surface parking lots available for infill development. We feel that this study of additional height should be **focused only on a single block, Block 33**, the full block surface parking lot between NW Couch and NW Davis/NW 4<sup>rd</sup> and NW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenues and that the height that is studied for this site should be **no more than 150’**. This site is a catalytic opportunity site and has had several opportunities at real development. Despite \$12 million dollars of reserved TIF funding, the owner could not make this happen under the current 100’ height limit. We were challenged to look at using height as a development tool and having additional height **up to 150’** available for this site in bonuses that would meet district goals such as housing or preservation is something that the neighborhood would like to explore further. This block is too big to fail and we must look at this opportunity and its impact to the district and the city.
2. We want to be clear about the discussion of height ... without strong design guidelines in which the city can ensure compatible infill development in the district while minimizing the uncertainty of anyone undertaking the land use process, there cannot be a discussion of additional height in the district. We strongly recommend that the sequencing of the recommended implementation actions, Actions RC4, UD2 and UD3, UD4 and UD5, **be done concurrent with one another** and that these be done as part of the CC 2035 planning process. We need to move forward and adopt the already drafted Skidmore Old Town historic design guidelines and begin the work and development of new and specific design guidelines for New Chinatown Japantown as soon as possible. This would include updating the National Register nomination for New Chinatown Japantown historic district. We would support the use of PDC TIF resources to ensure that this could be done in the expedited timing that we are recommending.

3. We are a neighborhood that is rooted in an incredibly rich historical past. The architectural and cultural history of this district can be an economic driver for the district and help shape and inform the neighborhood identity. There needs to be a stronger emphasis on the tools for economic support for rehabilitation of these significant historic resources in the district and we are afraid that the longer range 2035 planning and possible changes in the regulatory framework, if any, may be too late for some of these properties. We will continue to work with the Portland Development Commission on short term resources to help with the preservation of these buildings, but we need a long term plan that can ensure that these buildings and the history of the district are around for generations to come.
4. Housing balance in the district continues to be challenging. While we have done an extraordinary job preserving the affordable housing in the district with partners like Central City Concern, Innovative Housing, Blanchet House, Transition Projects and the many other non-profit partners, we continue to have an in-balance of housing in the district. Over 66% of the housing in the district is at 60% MFI or below. There is no better place in this city to target more diverse housing and incomes than in Old Town Chinatown. Ensuring the new units constructed in the district meet the target between 50% - 120% MFI for workforce, student and market rate housing is critical for this diversity. This is the reason that we supported the SDC waiver incentive on up to 500 units of new housing as part of the 5-Year Action Plan. We will continue to look at tools that help us meet the goals of changing this balance of housing for Old Town Chinatown.
5. We do not support the closure or taxing of the surface parking lots in the district. Closing surface parking lots will not stimulate development. In fact, it will create further challenges for the district as we try to attract more companies to move into the neighborhood. We do support the Portland Development Commission's effort to build a dedicated parking structure that will support the preservation parking stalls for the many historic buildings in the district. Finding these types of tools along with other subsidies to incentivize new development on surface parking lots is where we need to be focused.

We look forward to working with the BPS staff to ensure that this long term planning helps move Old Town Chinatown into the future as a vibrant, economically healthy and viable neighborhood for this city. This is the time and this neighborhood truly is on the brink of great progress.

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