

Portland Neighbors for Sustainable Development

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Testimony on Mixed Use Zones Project Proposed Draft to PSC

To: Portland Planning and Sustainability Commission
Chair Schultz and Commissioners:

Portland Neighbors for Sustainable Development is working to shape our city with land use and transportation policies that combat climate change, make housing available to all, and support alternative transportation. We laud the effort that went into the Mixed Use Zones project. We applaud the expansion of pedestrian-friendly, urban zoning, and the reduction in the amount of auto-dominated areas in the city. We appreciate the effort to improve Neighborhood Centers through the Main Street Centers Overlay.

We do have some concerns:

CM-2 FAR and Bonuses:

The primary innovation of the Mixed Use Zones project was to reduce the allowed capacity (in FAR) in the new CM-2 zone, compared with the CS and CM it will replace. Then, bonuses in FAR and in an additional partial fifth floor would be offered when developers provided Community Benefits such as Affordable Housing and Affordable Commercial Space. However, a city-commissioned market analysis from 18 months ago and done again more recently shows the bonus is not likely to be taken advantage of very often citywide, and probably never in East Portland. In addition, a key incentive was the fifth floor, which will not be available in many parts of the city where CM-2 is mapped, furthering the inequities in this bonus system.

This “tamp down and bonus up” scheme has the net effect (since the bonus will be used rarely) of reducing housing capacity along Corridors and in Centers by about one-fourth, in places that have the best transit service and shopping options outside downtown. It will lead to higher housing costs as close-in sites for multifamily housing are restricted in density and less housing gets built. **We urge you to either change the CM-2 base FAR from 2.5:1 to 3.5:1, or eliminate the FAR maximums, in order to increase housing affordability, and grow our Centers and Corridors into viable 20-minute Neighborhoods.**

Low-rise commercial storefront areas:

A late addition to the proposal, this move downzones, from CM-2 to CM-1, the heart of many of the neighborhood main street areas throughout the city, including Hawthorne, Sandy, Multnomah Village, and Woodstock. It is contrary to the planning principles incorporated in the Centers and Corridors strategies in the Growth Scenarios Report. The core of these Centers is exactly where the highest density should be, to provide the most

people living within a walkable neighborhood, to reduce auto use, and allow more housing in high opportunity areas. Reducing the zoning capacity in these key areas will, again, contribute to increased housing costs.

It is not clear that limiting new buildings to 3 stories instead of 4 would achieve the desired preservation of “low-rise” areas, and it could still result in teardowns. Significant buildings should be protected through city efforts to facilitate placing them on the National Register of Historic Places, which several Hawthorne buildings are already on. **We urge you to eliminate the “low-rise commercial storefront area” downzoning from all areas of the city, to increase housing affordability and support the Growth Strategy. These properties should return to CM-2.**

Support proposal in banning drivethroughs in CM-1, 2 and 3:

We support the proposed Comp Plan policy statement banning new drivethroughs in the Central City, and limiting them in Centers and Corridors. We also approve of the rezoning of many CG areas to CM-2. New language in the plan is more flexible on rebuilding in those places where nonconforming drivethroughs already exist.

Oppose requested Zone Changes for auto-oriented businesses:

We oppose changing the zoning on the four Fred Meyer stores where the company asked to change from CM-2 to CE to allow drivethroughs at those stores (Hawthorne, Glisan, Gateway, and Barbur.). We oppose other downzonings for large retailers. We also ask that gas stations, fast food and coffee establishments and other retailers not be granted special zoning for drivethroughs in the areas where CM-2 or CM-3 is now planned. .

Ground Floor Windows:

We support the increased Ground Floor Window requirements, including the several options for residential-only buildings. We also note that for a window assembly to function as a “ground floor window”, one must be able to see into the building in the entire area between 4’ and 6’ above the adjacent exterior grade. Language to require this should be added back to Sec. 33.130.230 C. In addition, fins, slats or screens should not cover such windows.

Setbacks & Stepbacks:

We thank the staff for conceiving language to relate building façade height to street width in the CM-3 zone, and for crafting the required rear setbacks that protect light and air for adjacent single-family development in all Mixed Use zones.

We thank the Commission for your diligent review of this complex document, and urge the refinement of the regulations noted here, to improve this proposal and help our commercial areas and our city thrive in a sustainable manner.

Signed:

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