

May 26, 2015

TESTIMONY

Date: May 26, 2015

To: André Baugh, Chair, Portland Planning and Sustainability Commission
Commission Members

From: #CEIDCreatives, represented by José González, Executive Director of Milagro

Re: Proposed Concept Plan for the SE Quadrant of the Central City Plan

Who Are the #CEIDCreatives?

The #CEIDCreatives is a new coalition of artists, makers, and creative workers who call the Central Eastside Industrial District home. We work, perform, create, network, and live within its boundaries. For years, the CEID has been a haven for the creative class, with low cost space and convenient access to our audiences, customers, suppliers, and employees. The abundance of creative businesses fosters networks of support and interdependence, where, for example, a theatre company can connect with a web designer, a printer, or a graphic artist as well as source materials or craftspersons for building sets.

Who Is Leading the Effort?

Milagro is a 31-year-old Portland institution whose home has been in the heart of the CEID, at 6th and Stark, since 1995. Milagro's mission is "to provide extraordinary Latino theatre, culture and arts education experiences for the enrichment of all communities." Concerned that the preservation of arts & culture has not been considered in the development plans for the CEID, Milagro received a grant from SE Uplift and the Office of Neighborhood Involvement to host a series of conversations with their neighbors to give voice to the CEID's creative sector.

The first of three conversations was held on May 20th, 2015 and was attended by CEID artists, residents, business owners in addition to members of the Central Eastside Industrial Council, policymakers, and press. At the meeting, we formalized the #CEIDCreatives Coalition and identified a wide list of concerns from those who care about preserving arts & culture in the CEID.

What Emerged

Much is right about the CEID, and we are here to ask you to protect what works. There is also much that needs to be done to make the CEID into a vibrant, safe, healthy, and attractive place to work, live and enjoy.

There is incredible interest in this issue. We have summarized the main themes that emerged from the first conversation and ask that they be considered in your current deliberations as well as in future work in this Quadrant. We would like to establish an ongoing dialogue between the City and the #CEIDCreatives coalition in order to ensure thoughtful consideration of the needs of this sector in all City decisions and actions. In addition, as resident artists, #CEIDcreatives would appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the aesthetic/design conversations of the planning process.

What is Right

Many factors have contributed to the abundance and health of the creative sector in the CEID.

1. The protection provided by the industrial sanctuary designation reduces upward pressures on the cost of space as well as reduces conversion of properties to more intense uses such as housing or general commercial. We urge the City to maintain the Industrial Sanctuary designation in a way that recognizes the fact that creative businesses make stuff, i.e., they are small industries.
2. Maintaining a mix of uses: Having a lively and vibrant district requires providing the services and amenities people expect and need. Workers need a place to work, but they also need a place to eat lunch, shop, check out a book, get a haircut, mail a letter.
3. In addition to being an integral part of the region's economy, the CEID is also the "downtown" for southeast Portland, with about 100,000 people living within a mile radius of the district. The Plan should recognize this role.
4. Continue providing transportation alternatives: the more people—customers and employees—that can access the CEID by bicycle, streetcar, bus and foot the better. Major concerns about traffic and parking are best addressed through increased choices and promotion of those choices.

What Can Be Made Better

Many of the keys to the CEID's success are also the cause of some of its biggest challenges. Being close in and accessible puts strain on social services, transportation networks, cost of space, affordability of housing, etc. Following is a short and draft list of issues and concerns that affect the viability of the creative sector.

1. Safety—the CEID lacks significant portions of public infrastructure to protect people from danger including missing sections of sidewalk, insufficient street lighting, infrequent protected crossings of high traffic roads, and incomplete or missing bicycle lanes.
2. Security: Many of the above physical conditions contribute to the perception that the CEID is not a safe place to visit or work, especially after dark. As the destination of many homeless people who don't feel welcome in the downtown area, people's concerns about personal security dampens interest in district cultural and after-hours activities, harming both the district's vitality as well as the ability of creatives to share their work.
3. Health—Key health concerns include poor air quality (I-5, 99E and the railroad are major sources of particulates, CO and ozone), lack of public restrooms, and noise pollution. These affect employees, residents and visitors alike.
4. Lack of public support for arts & cultural organizations, including visibility for First Friday events and acknowledgement of the neighborhood's rich history as a cultural incubator. Consider adding an eastside state-of-the-art facility, perhaps a component of the Portland5.
5. Need for "human space"—The CEID suffers from a severe lack of people-oriented spaces, such as parks, a library, pedestrian zones (plazas and pedestrian streets), and community gardens.
6. Affordable housing: There are two major issues here—addressing the needs of homeless people and developing work/live spaces for artists and creatives.
 - a. The City must champion solutions at the city, regional and state level to provide housing for all residents. Accessible and affordable housing is the only way to address the growing numbers of people living on the streets of the CEID.
 - b. While the #CEIDCreatives strongly discourages more residential zoning in the district, creating work/live opportunities for artists and creatives is consistent with our goals of fostering this sector and ensuring the long term viability of the district as a center of the creative economy. Projects such as Milepost5 in east Portland provide a model.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these ideas with the Commission.

Sincerely,

José E. González
Executive Director & Founder
Milagro