



meeting notes

TO

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REF Meridian Corridor Property Owner Meeting; September 17, 2009

The City of Edgewood Community Development Department hosted an invited group of property owners along the Meridian Avenue corridor on September 17, 2009. Approximately 25-30 property owners attended the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to update those property owners and solicit comment from them on

- current city capital projects affecting the corridor;
- regulatory changes already in process to EMC Title 18;
- the city initiative to revise its land development regulations to be more user-friendly;
- current and forecast market conditions; and
- potential regulatory changes.

Property owner comments are summarized in the following section followed by some general thematic comments from the consultant team, CREÄ Affiliates, LLC.

Public Comments

Real Estate and Financial Market Conditions

- Real estate market conditions have deteriorated significantly. Demand for housing and retail space is diminished. Financing for new development—both



commercial and residential—is now more expensive and more difficult to obtain due to the recession and uncertainties in the financial markets.

- Property owners are eager to develop but face some timing challenges, including market conditions, availability of financing and completion of the sewer LID.
- Real estate and financial market realities now suggest that the predominant market for new homes in Edgewood is in the \$200,000-\$300,000 range. Demand for more expensive higher end homes is significantly diminished. New homes are likely to be smaller in size (less square footage).
- The forecast for residential development suggests that demand will be strongest for households aged 25-34 (young singles, couples and small families) and households over age 55 (senior households).
- Retail market is struggling due to challenges with commercial debt and financing as well as a general reluctance to spend among consumers.
- Residential market demand and values are stabilizing but “recovery” will be slow (years).

Residential Densities

- Significant support for increasing residential densities within the Town Center.
- Need higher densities to support commercial and retail development.
- Build higher density along the Meridian Corridor and the retail will follow (financial conditions allowing).
- Need for higher density smaller unit senior housing is supported by the market analysis.
- Three to four-story higher density development (mixed use and residential) should be allowed along the Corridor—will allow for new development when market conditions improve.
- Remove the density requirement to allow the market to dictate development density.

Circulation

- The proposed parallel road cuts through deep properties
- Allow the parallel road location to be relatively flexible
- The widening of Meridian Avenue and the addition of the parallel road network will allow developments to meet their concurrency requirements.



- Some property owners suggested putting parking towards the front of properties while others wanted it towards the side and rear of properties.

Public Fee Impact on Cost of Development

- Traffic impact fees are too high. Auto-oriented commercial developers go elsewhere to avoid paying traffic impact fees.
- Development fees (in general) are too high. Gives developers impression that Edgewood is not “business friendly”. Land is still expensive, so developers need lower fees as an incentive to make higher density projects more feasible.
- Concern over cost of the proposed sewer—should be equalized for all property owners.
- For some vacant property owners, cost of sewer is prohibitive if they cannot generate revenue from their land now to pay for the assessments. Could lead to defaults on payment of sewer assessments later. One suggestion was to allow “temporary” uses now (such as car sales, vehicle storage) before sewer is in place.
- Implement 10-Year tax abatement for multi-family development (like Tacoma).
- Increase city marketing efforts to attract new businesses.

City Development Regulations

- Need PUD type ordinance for larger parcels to increase market flexibility and improve financial feasibility for higher density projects.
- Increase city commitment to the Development Agreement process and allow it to be utilized more often.
- Development code revisions needed to allow for more “flexibility”. Allow for “reasonable” deviations from the design standards through a simple administrative process rather than a lengthy and expensive review and approval process.
- Make it easier to get Variances from the code requirements.
- Changes or amendments to the development regulations need to be expedited.
- Review “home occupations” section of the development regulations to support more.
- Storage units, warehouses, wholesale or showroom sales should be allowed in the commercial zone along the corridor.



- Allowed uses should not be so restrictive in the zoning code. Allow for more “flexibility” in determining allowable and appropriate commercial uses.
- Frequent turnover in city staff makes it harder to get projects reviewed and approved.
- Allow for combined (shared) or regional stormwater management facilities.
- Allow “vehicle sales” as an allowed use in commercial zone to increase retail sales tax revenue.
- Review EMC 18.90.090
 - Landscaping – require reasonable standards; delete 40 feet landscaping requirement
 - Eliminate the Tree Retention Plan requirement
 - Design Standards – require reasonable standards
 - Delete 18.80.080 till sign ordinance is revised
 - Delete lot coverage requirement
- Concern over perceived onerous sign regulations and lot coverage limitations in the current code.

Form Based Code

- Examine the use of a “form-based code” for the corridor that would emphasize the look and design of buildings and blocks rather than restricting uses.
- How would a form-based code help meet the concurrency requirements of the Growth Management Act?

Observations and Comments

- It appears that the existing development regulations are not appropriate for current development realities nor do they accommodate the vision in the Town Center Plan very well.
- The distribution and depth of properties in this area suggests that it will be challenging developing a cohesive, interconnected, pedestrian friendly Town Center, unless guided by thoughtful legislation.
- Form-based code could accommodate the need for flexible density and uses.
- Form-based codes provide another tool for influencing site design for walkability and interconnectedness.
- The request for PUDs and the like (Development Agreements) should be weighed carefully. Excessive use of these tools allows each property to develop without full consideration of its neighboring properties. This increases the risks



of negatively impacting adjacent development. These also typically have a sunset requirement which forces owners to go through the process again, if the permit expires before a development can be secured for the property.

- If the parallel road is addressed incrementally with each new development, then there are chances that the full alignment may take years to materialize or that it may not align at all as each property owner addresses the road independently. The City could address that through a planning and engineering process to determine the best alignment for parallel roads along the full length of the corridor, perhaps both north and south of the corridor. If the alignment is generally supported by the property owners, then they can either dedicate the land back to the city or designate it a public easement. The other approach would be to use a form based code that offers more prescriptive standards for internal circulation and interconnections between adjacent properties. Both strategies would create efficiencies in the use of land for public ROWs as well as lower development costs. A continuous well defined right of way will also help in the location and distribution of utilities.
- In addition to an internal circulation system, it will benefit the Town Center Development if the city was to develop a clear strategy for open space and public plazas. Similar to the road issue, this might be achieved through agreements for the public use of private open space, easements or dedication of land for public use of the open space or plaza.
- The depth of properties suggests that future zoning should support horizontal mixed use. Otherwise, property owners might then be compelled to fall back on the PUD or Development Agreement Process, which is negotiated, could take a while and is time sensitive. Horizontal mixed use also allows for the sharing of facilities between different uses such as parking and some utilities.
- It appears that in addition to development regulations, there could be some issues with the fees and costs of development. This may warrant its own investigation to improve the city's image as a "development-friendly" institution.

This meeting provided the CREA team with invaluable insights into the challenges and opportunities for developing the Town Center Vision. These issues will be considered to the best extent possible in the update of the city's zoning and other development regulations.