
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Date: July 12, 2011

To: Westside Development Code Representatives

From: Dave Ward, Planning Manager

Subject: Summer Development Code Refinement Workshop #1 – July 20, 2011

Currently, the Community Development Department is preparing for the first of two additional workshops to gather Westside representative and public input on topics expressed during the public review of the draft Westside Development Code (The Draft Development Code can be found at: <http://www.cityofventura.net/page/community-plan-amp-development-code>). Implementation of the Development Code, over time, is to enhance the Westside neighborhood --- beyond one parcel, building or street --- as cohesive place. This memo is meant to outline several main points to be addressed at Workshop #1 on July 20, 2011, specifically: Neighborhood Zone Transitions; Upper Floor Setback Requirements; Building Massing along Ventura Avenue; and Design Features of Retail Frontage. It is hoped this memo will provide advance information, stimulate your thoughts and foster discussion points for our first workshop. We look forward to hearing your thoughts at the meeting.

1. Neighborhood Zone Transitions

Issue: Participants in the May 17, 2011 Development Code workshop expressed concern over the height transition between neighborhoods of varying transect zones and specific concern for rear building design.

Background: Under State Planning Law, the formulation of a Development Code for an area, such as the Westside, is required to be consistent with the land use intensity assigned by the adopted General Plan. As such the Westside Development Code contains transect zones for development intensity defined by the General Plan; context sensitivity of the resources/character unique to the Westside neighborhoods; and reasonably foreseeable development anticipated through 2025. City of Ventura form-based codes have emphasized the relationship between private spaces and public spaces through the required size of rear yards or shared open spaces, and the relationship between the main and ancillary buildings. Thus, gradual transitions between transect intensities to create Urban Nodes, as well as human scale neighborhoods is encouraged to create a livable and vibrant neighborhood as a whole.

Current Code Requirements: As the area assigned the most intense residential development in the City of Ventura, the Westside was intended to accommodate an array

of higher density residential neighborhoods than any other part of the City. However, given the context sensitivity of the Westside, the November 2010 Preliminary Draft Development Code reduced existing maximum allowable height regulations within the neighborhoods. The April 2011 Draft Code created an incentive of added height to private development in exchange for providing public plazas and parks. The current Draft Development Code allows single-family dwelling units up to two-story; multi-family dwelling units up to three stories in height and accessory buildings. The original proposal called for an additional incentive of one additional story for public park or plaza dedication by a development proposal. However, with Council's June 6, 2011 direction, the project description presented for environmental analysis will now limit the Parks/Height Incentive to Ventura Avenue and remove it from the neighborhoods.

Furthermore, in line with context sensitive urban design, Westside transect profiles were designed specifically to afford no more than a one-story height difference for gradual transitions between varying intensities throughout the neighborhoods. Sharp differences between alternately zoned areas is further avoided through primary structure setback standards that consider the presence of a rear alley. With few exceptions, abutting blocks of the Westside area are adjacent in a transitional pattern that allows for no more than a one-story height difference. Those few exceptions along Dakota Drive, Shoshone Street and Vince Street are either characterized by a stark difference in base topographical elevation, resulting in lesser difference at the rooflines between the building heights of each respective transect zone, or are already buffered by an existing or proposed alley that will provide necessary separation (See Photos 1, 2 and 3).

Alternatives for Discussion:

- ❑ Additional alterations to accessory structure setbacks can further address proximity of neighboring structures under varying circumstances such as parcels with an alley as a buffer and those without alley separation, with resultant implications to developable area of the parcel;
- ❑ Expanded use of Building Mass Overlay on additional blocks of the Westside project area with implications to the amount of buildable square footage and number of residential units.
- ❑ Redesignate transects located at Dakota and Shoshone forgoing the opportunity for Urban Nodes that provide neighborhood service opportunities and create necessary density for transit service.

2. Upper Floor “Stepped Setbacks” from Rear/Front in Neighborhood T-zones

Issue: Participants in the May 17, 2011 Development Code workshop raised questions regarding impact of second story residential structures on sensitive neighboring structures; and suggested closer review of upper story setback requirements of the Building Mass Overlay and potential for inclusion of requirements for rear upper story restrictions as well.

Background: In conjunction with the Draft Westside Community Plan and Development Code, a Westside Historic Resources Survey was performed to identify buildings or potential future historic districts that might be historic contributors to the neighborhoods. Several ‘resource conservation’ areas were identified as less than significant historic contributors to the Westside areas, but were deemed to have retained enough defining character to qualify as areas with a context sensitivity, or ‘conservation areas’ to be considered for future development. The historic resources report identified the features within these recommended conservation areas for further consideration by the city.

Current Code Requirements: The Historic Preservation Committee (HPC) recommendations were incorporated into the April 2011 Development Code as the Building Mass Overlay Zone (BM Overlay). The BM Overlay provides measures that ensure future redevelopment, or additions and remodeling of property is conducted with respect to context and form of the existing neighborhood by placing more stringent requirements on upper story setbacks from the front of a residential structure. It also restricts commercial block building types in the overlay areas. However, this 35’ foot second-story setback only addresses the front visual interface of the building to the street, effectively pushing second-story additions to the rear of all structures.

To address the rear interface of parcels in neighborhoods, the impact of a second story on neighboring rear property was deferred to property line setback requirements as the appropriate mechanism for addressing space between structures.

Alternatives for Discussion:

- Allow for more flexible design standard for second-story additions.
- Expand the requirements of the Building Mass Overlay to include rear second story setback requirements. Study and understand implication to overall structural proportion of second story to first story massing.
- Revisit overall parcel setback requirements for structures in sensitive zones.

3. Massing - Private Development (Overall Building Heights/Corridor Heights):

Issue: Participants in the May 17, 2011 Development Code workshop expressed concerns regarding the overall building massing along Ventura Avenue and the potential to create a canyon effect along the commercial corridor.

Background: A primary objective of the 2005 General Plan Infill First strategy and form-based coding is to enable the means of creating public spaces that are of human scale and comfortable to the pedestrian mode of travel. The current April 2011 Development Code implements the vision of the 2005 General Plan as one of several primary commercial and mixed-use corridors throughout the City to serve as a necessary center for providing neighborhoods serving uses and a public realm for gathering and community engagement.

Current Code Requirements: Along Ventura Avenue, the predominant transects in the Development Code for mixed-use development are T5.5 and T4.11 with 4-story and 3-story height limits, respectively. By comparison, the Midtown Code T4.5 zone and Saticoy & Wells T 4.11 also allow for 3 stories. In addition, the Midtown T5.2 allows for 6 stories and the Saticoy & Wells T 5.4 allows for 4 stories. However, as the oldest developed area of the City, Ventura Avenue presents special challenges to this goal of developing an urban center as its historic parcel and block size are uncharacteristically small. Thus the Westside Development Code has lowered the anticipated 6-story height that may have otherwise been called for by the General Plan (in a T5.5 urban center). Additionally, as the General Plan land use designations vary along Ventura Avenue, T5.5 does not predominate as the only transect zone along Ventura Avenue, but rather it is interspersed with T4.11 for varying allowable heights.

Other tools such as variegated roofline features and requirements of the Mixed-Type Development Standards for larger redevelopment also contribute to avoidance of a preponderance of the monolithic building type along any one stretch of the commercial corridor. Parcels fronting Ventura Avenue that are over 2 acres are required by the Development Code to provide park and open space to their development project. All of the above design mechanisms create air space between buildings what would otherwise constitute a wall of development along a corridor.

Alternatives for Discussion:

- Alter allowable heights for T4.11 and T5.5 zones.

4. Massing - Public Realm (Sidewalk and Plaza Spaces):

Issue: Continued from Number 3 above.

Current Code Requirements: Along Ventura Avenue, public sidewalks are sized at a narrower scale than elsewhere in the City. Narrow sidewalks widths that offer little separation between private development and the public right-of-way, nor ample space for pedestrians, create the appearance of multi-story buildings that loom on the street. By comparison, the sidewalks in the Downtown area are 12' (See Photo 4). On the Westside, the most common sidewalk width is approximately 8' (See Photo 5).

Under the assumption that the sidewalk is the main public place of a city and is most traveled by the pedestrian, the April 2011 Development Code calls for a private dedication of 5' in addition to existing public realm sidewalks to expand the distance between the curb front and the future redeveloped buildings for a total of 13' in those areas with an existing 8' sidewalk. Given the variability of the sidewalk widths along Ventura Avenue, this standard may need to be created with language to ensure a minimum pedestrian width, while still providing a developable area for redevelopment in the future.

Where the building mass is also an area of concern regarding abutting neighborhoods behind Ventura Avenue, the use of alleys creates space between the Commercial Corridor

area and neighboring residential areas to the rear. Proposed new alleys are contained in the Development Code.

Another public realm design feature, as stated previously, to create a human scale urban center is the Parks/Height incentive. The Parks/Height incentive would grant up to one story of additional height for public plaza space. Public plaza space serves as a necessary break in the linear face of urban development and offers areas for respite or gathering of neighbors in the public realm.

Alternatives for Discussion:

- ❑ Redefine the sidewalk standard to require a 12' minimum setback from the curb front to ensure a pedestrian friendly 12' sidewalk width, consistent with the downtown.
- ❑ Stipulate mandatory sidewalk dedication by new development along Ventura Avenue in the Development Code.
- ❑ Establish minimum alley width standards to rear of Commercial Corridor parcels.

5. Eclectic Commercial Character:

Issue: Neighborhood participants on the public review process expressed a desire for the Westside Development Code to include shopfront requirements that retain and accommodate the “eclectic nature” of Ventura Avenue.

Current Code Requirements: At present the Urban Nodes designated for the primary focus as pedestrian, mixed-use gathering places are regulated by the Shopfront Overlay Zone in the Development Code (SF Overlay) as well as the provisions of the T4.11 and T5.5 zones. The transect requirements call for a minimum 15' floor height for first stories. The SF frontage type stipulates minimum building transparency, or open window space along a building frontage of 60%.

Combining design elements that define a minimum first floor height and minimum building transparency (windows) creates a consistent street wall that is friendly, comfortable, safe for pedestrians and able to be leased to retailers, promoting products and services. The arrangement of design and frontages largely determines the character of an area and quality of the pedestrian environment. Window requirements provide eyes on the street for pedestrian safety and a more welcoming and interesting streetscape that indicates the types of uses and activities occurring in the buildings. Furthermore, minimum height and transparency standards ensure feasible retail space for retail operation and business visibility. Typical codes for retail frontages require between 50% and 70% minimum transparency requirements on ground floor retail spaces (See Photos 6-9). In the instance of Transit Oriented Districts with a high degree of anticipated pedestrian usage, the transparency minimum can be as high as 80%. A 15' height minimum for retail frontages is the design standard in modern construction for neighborhood serving retail.

Alternatives for Discussion:

- Alter minimum standards for first floor heights and building transparency.

Photo 1: Transect transition at Dakota Drive between T5.5 and T 3.5. Grade differential accommodates variance in allowable maximum height between transect zones.



Photo 2: Transect transition at Shoshone Street between T5.5 and T3.5. Grade differential accommodates variance in allowable maximum height between transect zones.



Photo 3: Alley separation creates space between T5.5 and T3.6 zones on Vince Street to the rear of Ventura Avenue retail corridor.



Photo 4: Downtown Ventura 12' sidewalk width accommodates streetscape elements and pedestrian activity.



Photo 5: Ventura Avenue Corridor 8' sidewalk.



Photo 6: Retail frontage with less than 50% minimum transparency requirement.



Photo 7: Retail frontage with less than 50% minimum transparency requirement.



Photo 8: Bell Arts Center with approximately 75% building transparency (windows and doors).



Photo 9: Casa de Anza with high percentage building transparency.

