

Centers, Corridors and Wedges – Advisory Group Meeting #6 – March 3, 2009

Summary Minutes

I. Welcome and Introductions

Laura Harmon (Planning Dept.) opened the meeting at 6:10 p.m. and welcomed everyone to the meeting followed by introductions.

II. Presentation/ Advisory Group Discussion

Staff provided an update on the Advisory Group Process and noted the addition of a 7th meeting to wrap-up the group's work and to review all changes to the CCW document. Additionally, staff would need to update the dates shown on the flow chart for review and adoption of the document.

Status of Work (as of 3-3-09) in Response to Advisory Group Comments

Staff provided a status on work that has taken place as a result of the comments received by the Advisory Group as follows:

General

- Re-establish web survey – *complete, including neighborhood leader e-mail blast*
- At end of Advisory Process, determine additional input needed – *future*
- Develop a glossary for document – *underway*
- Revise wording for Vision – *for discussion tonight*
- Advisory Group to provide suggested language for Vision – *complete*
- Revise wording of Guiding Principles and provide explanatory text for each Principle – *for discussion tonight*
- Develop Executive Summary of document to be placed in front of document – *underway*
- Replace existing maps in document with more general “bubble” maps – *underway*
- Remove “numbers” from body of document and place in glossary - *underway*

Activity Centers

- Update CCW and GDP's to address similarities and differences between “centers” in each document – *underway*
- Revise text to indicate that mixed use and multi-use represent the desired character of Mixed Use Centers in Center City, not the prevalent building type – *underway*
- Revise text to strengthen the concept that the Center City is the heart of the City and Region – *underway*
- Revise text for Mixed Use Centers to make types of office (national/regional) more similar to Center City - *underway*
- Clarify park recommendations for Centers - *underway*

Growth Corridors

- Redefine Corridors to reflect positive characteristics – *complete, except for minor revisions*
 - Revise Corridor pictures to be less vehicle focused – *underway*
 - Further refine Corridor text to indicate that Corridors link land uses together, instead of dividing them – *underway*
- Add fourth subarea, Established Neighborhoods, to Corridors – *complete, except for minor revisions*
 - Provide additional information on transitions between established neighborhood and adjacent high intensity uses – *underway*
- Revise document to indicate Corridor Station Areas function as “Centers” around a rapid transit station - *complete*

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- Revise document to indicate Corridors can have areas with character of Mixed-Use Centers and smaller centers may be located in Wedges and Corridors – *Corridors complete; Wedges underway*

All Areas (Centers, Corridors and Wedges)

- Address areas with unique or historic qualities in design section of each area type - *underway*
- Revise document to refer to mixed use and multi-use in Centers, Corridors and Wedges, where appropriate – *underway*
- Develop summary of framework that highlights major common elements and differences between Centers, Corridors and Wedges - *underway*

Discussion of Status of Work

1. How many people took the survey? 154
2. Are we finished with discussion of Growth Corridors?
 - Staff explained that at the February 10th meeting staff presented new draft text for Corridors which included a new subarea for Established Neighborhoods, as well as substantial revisions to the description/definition of corridors. Based on the break-out group discussions that evening, there were two additional issues related to Corridors that needed further discussion. These were transportation issues and CDOT staff has prepared a presentation on these issues for discussion tonight.
3. There seems to be conflicting information in the information that staff sent out (the February 10th meeting minutes).
 - Staff explained that the information sent out were the minutes from the February 10th meeting and were intended to reflect the discussion at that meeting. That information was not meant to be staff's response to changes in the document. The proposed changes are all listed on the powerpoint slides that staff just reviewed.
4. When can we see the language for the "transition" terms that will be added to the glossary?
 - Staff agreed to provide some draft language at the next meeting.
5. Can we create a table with comments and the proposed revisions to the document?
 - Staff responded that the slides in the presentation are the tracking mechanism. If something is missing from the slides, group members need to let staff know as we will make changes to the document by looking at this list.

CDOT Presentation: Additional Information on Previous Growth Corridor Comments

Tracy Newsome, CDOT, reviewed the two Growth Corridor comments that needed further discussion based on the Advisory Group discussion at the February 10th meeting:

- Dense development in one area of a Corridor may adversely affect traffic in another area planned for pedestrian activity.
- No discussion of the traditional use of corridors for moving vehicular traffic – will there be an attempt to maintain them at existing widths and intensities?

Tracy began her presentation by pointing out that:

- Areas of dense development and areas planned for pedestrian activity are often the same areas; and,

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- “Growth Corridors” encompass more than a “traditional” corridor might.

Tracy noted that the two comments needing further discussion really just boiled down to the question of “How will we handle ‘traffic’ when planning and designing streets in Growth Corridors?” The answer is that we will use the same approaches in Growth Corridors as used in the rest of the City. More specifically, this includes:

- Creating streets that support and reflect their contexts
- Looking for a variety of ways to create capacity, access, and mobility
- Encouraging more travel by transit (particularly in Growth Corridors), walking, and cycling

Tracy further explained that the revisions to the draft CCW document discussed previously (see listing of status of work, above) will help to clarify the common elements between Centers, Corridors and Wedges. This will help to show that there are common approaches for handling traffic in Centers, Corridors, and Wedges, including:

- Creating streets that support and reflect their contexts by applying USDG processes and design approaches throughout Charlotte
- Creating better streets
- Creating more streets, so that we can create better streets
- Creating the types of streets that support Charlotteans’ ability to safely and comfortably walk, cycle, use transit, and drive

Discussion of Additional Information on Previous Corridor Comments

1. What happens if *areas of dense development are not areas planned for pedestrian activity*?
 - The approach would be the same whether the area was in an Activity Center, Growth Corridor or Wedge.
2. If there is higher density, what keeps us from promoting more street capacity without regard to what is going on behind that density?
 - We always consider the context. For example, in the South Corridor we created more capacity by extending a parallel road – Old Pineville Road - rather than widening South Blvd.
3. What takes precedence, capacity or established neighborhoods? Also concerned that staff believes the grid system will solve everything instead of worrying about thoroughfares.
 - Both are considered, along with many other variables. One size does not fit all. We have to look at a large number of variables and consider the specific context for any given plan or street project. For example, the context and solution for the New Bern Station Area in the South Corridor is very different from that for the stations in the University City area. New Bern had an established street system of small blocks, while the University area does not. Capacity and mobility come through a variety of approaches, including planning for more streets in areas that are likely to have intensive development, but don’t have many streets now.
4. Are we saying that we will always apply the USDG process? This will drive up the cost of affordability. I don’t think we should refer to the USDG, and the 400 foot block lengths are not always appropriate.
 - The USDG recognizes that one size does not fit all, and emphasizes designing streets to support the context. The USDG are our adopted policy guidance for designing streets and are what staff uses. They include flexibility to accommodate the context and specific/unique

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characteristics of the area. Proposed developments also change or become part of the context that is considered, which is why more intensive developments would be expected to have shorter blocks. (Note: 400 foot blocks would only be expected in areas of the highest development intensities.)

- The specific block length references (i.e., 400 feet) will not be included in the revised text. As discussed previously (see listing of status of work, above) the “numbers” will be removed from the body of document and placed in glossary.
5. Are we going to address transportation differently in Growth Corridors?
- No, regardless of the location within CCW we will always utilize a context based approach. We will use the same analysis methodologies for Growth Corridors as we do for Activity Centers and Wedges.
6. Why have more than one way in and out of a neighborhood, when everyone is just commuting on the same thoroughfare into and out of the neighborhood? Why are we designing roads only for peak hour traffic.
- We have to consider that people do, in fact, travel at other times, for other reasons, and may want or need to use other modes. To accomplish this, we have to have more route options, shorter route options, and the ability to have better streets than might be possible without those options, so they can use other modes, too. (Similar to the networks that exist in the older, established neighborhoods like Elizabeth and Dilworth.)
7. How will this document influence decision making on state road improvements?
- The CCW is a City of Charlotte document providing broad policy context and certainly does not dictate decisions on state roads (or local roads for that matter). It is, however, intended to provide guidance on future growth and development and related infrastructure needs on a broad level.
8. Can we just take out the reference to USDG since we are trying to make this general?
- The USDG is City adopted policy related to how we plan and design streets, and taking out the references would not be appropriate. However, the specific numbers will be removed from the text and put in a glossary to help better explain concepts like “walkable blocks”.
9. Why do we have to have a lot of streets to have good streets? We need more thoroughfares so commuters will not go through the neighborhoods.
- We need both thoroughfares and more streets. It really has to do with scale and the ability to have a variety of streets that can accommodate the various modes of travel – automobiles, walking, biking, and transit. With more streets, we not only create more route and mode options, but also the streets can be designed to be more context sensitive.

III. Break-Out Group Discussions

Because some members of the advisory group felt that more discussion was needed on Growth Corridors, staff proposed a change in the Break-out Group discussions, with one group continuing the discussion on Growth Corridors and the other group discussing the comments on Wedges. The advisory group agreed that this was a good approach since it appeared that most of the remaining issues regarding Growth Corridors were specific to the Elizabeth neighborhood.

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A. Breakout Group on Growth Corridors:

The discussion continued on the Growth Corridor boundaries and specifically on the Elizabeth neighborhood and its inclusion in a corridor. Questions arose over why the Elizabeth neighborhood was included within the Growth Corridor boundaries while other areas further south were not. The main points of the discussion were as follows:

1. How were the Growth Corridor boundaries drawn, and why can't there be an opportunity during this process to redraw those boundaries?
 - The Growth Corridors were originally defined based on the presence of at least three high capacity transportation facilities – interstate/expressway; major thoroughfare(s), existing or planned rapid transit and/or a freight rail line – that run parallel to each other. The specific boundaries were drawn based on the existing and adopted future land uses in the area. These boundaries were adopted by City Council in May 2006 as part of the *Transportation Action Plan*. Modifications to these boundaries are made through the Area Plan process. Staff does not support removal of the neighborhoods in Corridors through the CCW adoption process. Instead, a new subarea, Established Neighborhoods has been created for Corridors.
2. What impact will there be on neighborhoods within Growth Corridors if 70-75% of new office and multi-family developments are targeted for Growth Corridors or Centers?
 - Every new development would still have to follow the same development approval process that currently exists. Development proposals that require a rezoning will be evaluated by Planning staff and that evaluation will be mainly based on the adopted area plan and the *General Development Policies*. Area Plans typically include recommendations on how to provide an appropriate transition between established neighborhoods and new high intensity uses when these are located within the plan boundaries.
3. How will this impact traffic on streets in Growth Corridors and won't this in turn trigger road widening, which would then have a negative impact on the surrounding neighborhoods?
 - All transportation improvements made by the City will be designed based on the approach outlined in the Urban Street Design Guidelines. This approach is based on balancing transportation needs for all modes with the existing and planned development context for an area. If additional capacity is desired, City staff will look at the context and determine if there is a solution that is appropriate within the development context.
4. What's the rush to get this CCW document adopted, and can't it wait until after the Elizabeth Area Plan is completed?
 - Staff believes that it would not be appropriate to delay the adoption of the CCW document until after the Elizabeth Area Plan (or any other Area Plan) is completed. City staff needs an updated CCW framework to help guide other policy efforts. Additionally, it would not be fair to the many citizens that have been involved in the input process.

B. Breakout Group on Wedges:

The following are all the comments that had been submitted to date concerning Wedges:

1. Unclear how inappropriate density is prevented
2. Concerned that concept is lowering property value in Wedges
3. There should be flexibility to develop higher density in the Wedges, if there is a need

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4. Commercial buildings are needed in Wedges, too
5. Why more street connections if no density (p23)
6. Housing Charlotte 2007 has recommended more affordable housing in all 5 major wedges. How does this plan (CC&W) address that goal?
7. Remove the reference to 600' blocks on page 26. The USDG reference is sufficient since there are no approved standards
8. Also pg 26 – would CATS not change its routes to match demand rather than how the paragraph is written?
9. References to limiting utility extensions conflict with CMUD plans. Well & septic is not an urban choice (land use & environmental reasons)
10. Pg. 28 – define sustainable. Why improve water quality as a priority – when you are relegated to septic tanks & wells according to the utility extension policy.
11. Also – the note on tree preservation as a priority is odd, remembering that Myers Park was a cotton field before the developer planted the trees. I assume it is as a consequence of the lack of density or lesser densities – thus by default there would be more trees preserved. Should the emphasis be changes to better reflect what is really happening?
12. Part of the framework for Wedges states: “Mixed Use/Retail districts should be designed to allow access by car, but easy pedestrian circulation upon arrival.” Successful mixed use will always put people first, and a design that is based on accommodation of automobiles will fail.
13. Return to R-3 from R-4 in the Wedges
14. There are beautiful old neighborhoods on the east side but they are fragile. How do you keep all the wedges attractive and beautiful?

The breakout group reviewed each of the above comments and discussed whether or not further changes were needed to the draft document to address them. It was decided that no further action was needed on most of the comments **(#1-8, 11, 13, 14)**.

The group asked for further information on two comments **(#9 & #10)** and staff agreed to work with CMU to provide information on each of these items.

The group also suggested a change to the document in response to the concern in **#12**. The text change would be as follows: “Mixed Use/Retail districts should be designed to allow access by car, and encourage easy pedestrian circulation upon arrival.”

In addition, the group asked staff to:

- Provide an overview of how area plans are developed since there are so many references in CCW to the area plans.
- Add language in the document that CCW won't preclude the provision of affordable housing.
- Add the term “greenfield” to the glossary.

IV. Discuss Assignment for Next Meeting

Staff reminded the group that the next Advisory Group meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 31 in Room 280.

V. Adjourn