

# Agenda Report

**TO:** CITY COUNCIL

**DATE:** November 25, 2002

**FROM:** CITY MANAGER

**SUBJECT:** CENTRAL DISTRICT SPECIFIC PLAN FRAMEWORK

**RECOMMENDATION:** Following a public hearing, it is recommended that the City Council conceptually approve the Central District Specific Plan Framework as modified by the Planning Commission and other Commission and community comments in Attachment 2, and direct staff to initiate an environmental impact report on the Draft Central District Specific Plan.

**PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:** On October 23, 2002, following a public hearing, the Planning Commission adopted the following recommendation:

Recommend approval of the Central District Specific Plan Framework to the City Council with the following additional comments:

- The Planning Commission be involved in the EIR scoping process;
- Staff develop criteria for the circumstances when a developer can apply for the 10% FAR bonus;
- References to heights in stories in the General Plan be replaced with height in feet;
- In the EIR scoping process consider the following issues
  - Consider counting aboveground parking garages in the FAR calculations for parcels above a threshold size.
  - Consider whether it is appropriate to change the transit-oriented development areas from ¼ mile circles to a larger area.
  - Consider whether the FARs should be increased around the light rail stations and decreased accordingly elsewhere.

Staff concurs with the Planning Commission recommendation and Attachment 2 summarizes the recommended changes to the Central District Specific Plan Framework to respond to the Planning Commission and other comments.

**BACKGROUND:** The Central District Specific Plan Framework presents the primary regulatory elements of the Central District Specific Plan. These include sub-districts,

land use distribution, heights, intensity of commercial and residential development, setbacks, and sidewalk widths.

The purpose of the Framework is to identify these key regulations to continue community discussion and to initiate the environmental review of the Specific Plan.

Throughout October 2002, the Framework has been discussed with the Planning Commission, Design Commission, Transportation Advisory Commission, Community Development Committee, Cultural Heritage Commission and Civic Center Task Force, as well as by smaller groups of business and community members. A community open house was held on October 1, to receive comments from the community at large.

The Draft Central District Specific Plan will be released after the City Council gives concept approval of the Framework. At the same time, staff will begin the process of preparing an environmental impact report (EIR) to analyze the impacts of the Draft Specific Plan and of the Draft Land Use and Mobility Elements and revised Zoning Code. During the process of preparing and reviewing this EIR, the Draft Central District Specific Plan will also be discussed and reviewed by the community and commissions. This process will allow the draft Specific Plan to be reviewed concurrently with the Draft Land Use and Mobility Elements and with the draft EIR.

In mid 2003, the draft Central District Specific Plan and EIR will be presented to the City Council for adoption.

## **KEY COMPONENTS OF THE FRAMEWORK**

Reorganization of Districts: The Framework divides the Central District into seven sub-districts. Each of the sub-districts exhibits a distinct identity and physical character that will be reinforced by the Central District Specific Plan.

Heights: The map on page 17 of the Framework outlines the recommended height limits for the Central District. In many areas, the proposed heights are lower than the current zoning permits, however they are consistent with the Land Use Element of the General Plan. The General Plan recommended heights of no more than six stories on Lake Avenue north of Del Mar, and recommends heights of 60 feet outside of the strategy areas.

The Framework introduces a height averaging concept in many areas where up to 30% of the building can exceed the height by 10-15 feet, if an equal part of the building is below the height limit by 10-15 feet. This would allow more creative building design and would allow building heights to be tailored to respect adjacent historic buildings. The Design Commission would be the approval body for projects that proposed to use the height averaging concept.

Floor Area Ratios: The General Plan allocates square footage and housing units to seven strategy areas of the Central District. The Central District Framework recommends replacing these allocations with site-specific floor area ratios (FARs.) The FARs would regulate both residential and non-residential development. Highest FARs are along Lake and Colorado, next highest around the light rail stations and near the 210 freeway and lower in the southern parts of the Central District, near the surrounding residential neighborhoods. This approach is not intended to increase the development intensity permitted in the Central District, but to provide a means of allocating growth.

Sidewalk Widths and Setbacks: Through community meetings, staff has heard that newer residential buildings in the Central District are too close to the streets and sidewalks. Current zoning requires zero setback in many areas. The Framework permits residential and commercial setbacks on some streets and requires 5-10 feet setbacks in other areas. The Specific Plan also proposes minimum sidewalk widths on streets and recommends that new buildings on streets with inadequate sidewalk widths be required set the building back to widen the sidewalk.

Design Guidelines: The Central District Specific Plan will contain three chapters of design guidelines for the public realm, private realm, and additional guidelines for sub districts of the Central District. These guidelines were adopted by the City Council on October 21, 2002. The guidelines are not part of the Framework.

## **COMMUNITY AND COMMISSION REVIEW OF THE PLAN**

Attachment 2 is a matrix that summarizes comments from the various commissions and community groups and provides staff recommendation for changes in the Central District Framework and issues that should be studied during the preparation of the EIR.

Some of the issues raised by community members and commissions result in staff recommended changes to the Central District Framework. Other issues will need more careful evaluation during the process of preparing the draft Central District Specific Plan and the EIR.

The most frequent Issues that were raised by several commissions or community groups and staff response following are:

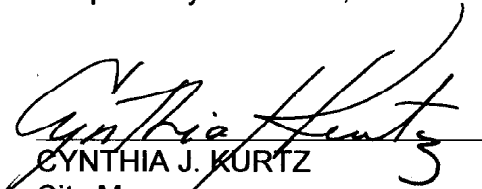
- Concern that allowing the recommended Floor Area Ratio (FAR) to be exceeded by up to 10% has the potential for abuse, and strict criteria for this 10% bonus should be developed. *Staff agrees and recommends that after the Framework is approved, criteria and findings for receiving this bonus be developed.*
- Floor Area Ratios should be increased around the light rail stations or in other areas of the Central District. *Because the FARs implement the General Plan intensity limits, and these limits are not recommended to increase, any increase should be carefully studied and counter-balanced with a decrease in another*

area. Staff recommends studying this issue during the Environmental Impact Report process.

- Above ground parking garages should be discouraged, possibly by including them in the calculation of FAR for a project. Staff agrees that aboveground parking garages should be discouraged, but including the square footage of parking garages in the FARs is inconsistent with the General Plan. In the Land Use Element of the General Plan, the building intensity standards exempt parking structures. Other means of discouraging parking structures will be explored.
- Upper floor space on Lake Avenue should be a minimum of 75% non-residential, not 50%. The General Plan was amended in August 2001 to permit residential development above the ground floor on South Lake Avenue, with a minimum of 50% of the project being non-residential. Increasing the minimum to 75% will render housing infeasible as a component of projects on South Lake.
- Building height in stories may not be consistent with building height in feet due to differing height requirements of residential and commercial uses. Staff agrees that building height in stories can be eliminated and replaced with height in feet.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** Completion of the Central District Specific Plan and preparation of the Environmental Impact Report are both included in the work program and budget of the Planning and Development Department.


Respectfully submitted,

  
CYNTHIA J. KURTZ  
City Manager

Prepared by:

  
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Laura F. Dahl  
Senior Planner

Approved by:

  
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Richard Bruckner  
Director  
Planning & Development Department

Attachment 1: Central District Specific Plan Framework  
Attachment 2: Matrix of Commission comments on the Framework