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Memorandum

To: Erik Bredfeldt
From: Carey Hayo
CC: Ralph Hilliard; Scott Wright; Pat Tyjeski
Re: Summary of Stakeholder Interviews for Form-Based Code/LDC Amendments
Date: April 10, 2012
Project: City of Gainesville Form-Based Code
Project No.: 20120010

Introduction

A comprehensive community participation program was designed for the Gainesville Form-Based Code (FBC) initiative in order to receive meaningful input from Gainesville citizens prior to beginning preparation of the Form-Based Code and Land Development Code (LDC) update. The initial activities undertaken as part of the community participation program included conducting stakeholder interviews with 31 Gainesville citizens over a two-day period.

The stakeholders selected for interview represented a broad and diverse range of interests in the community, including business, the University of Florida, Shands at the University of Florida, homeowner associations, builder associations, realtor associations, non-profits, and government. A list of the stakeholders participating in the interviews is attached.

A list of questions was prepared in coordination with City planning staff and was distributed to the selected stakeholders prior to the interview, along with a letter describing the scope and desired outcome of the project and the anticipated schedule of planned workshops and milestone work products that will be available to the public for review during the project. The objective of the interview questions was to solicit perceptions and opinions from Gainesville residents that will inform the project team in writing the FBC and updating the Land Development Code. The interview questions are also attached to this memorandum.

The interviews were conducted at the Thomas Center on February 29th, 2012 and at the Florida Community Design Center on March 28, 2012.

During the interviews, base maps of the Study Area were provided and the interviewees drew ideas, thoughts and concepts on the maps. These maps are attached to this memorandum.

During the interviews an extremely wide range of topics were discussed by the interviewees and opinions varied widely on the topics. However, a number of themes emerged as a common thread in the discussions. These themes and issues are described in summary form below and will inform the project team as the FBC moves forward.

Form-Based Code (FBC) Study Area

The boundaries of the Study Area are generally sound and represent areas that would be urban in nature and walkable. Suggestions were made to add to the area and, in some cases, to eliminate some of the areas as follows:

- Add area between University Avenue and SW 2nd Avenue from the Westgate Shopping Center to the University of Florida President's house.
- Extend the 13th Street Corridor north to 39th Avenue.
- Extend the Urban Village area to the southeast at the southern edge to include all of or portions of Butler Plaza.
- Do not include established residential areas in the FBC, such as Duck Pond, University Heights, parts of College Park and the neighborhoods between NW 13th Street and NW 6th Street north of University Avenue.
- When writing code for the corridors, include areas on both sides of the road corridor, either based on ownership or on existing access to the road.
- In general, most of the stakeholders agreed to the geographic area contained within the study area drawn by staff and confirmed that they considered the area to be urban and walkable. Only one of the stakeholders suggested extending the study area to include all of the land area north of Hawthorne Road to NE 8th Avenue.

Existing Character of Gainesville

- The majority of the stakeholders believe that Downtown is "working well" and that no additional regulations should be imposed on the area. There were very few objections to allowing taller buildings in downtown as long as the historic character is maintained. Additional programming (i.e. festivals, events and activities) of downtown is desired to create more of a "24/7" environment.

- Innovation Square is well-liked and perceived to be a positive project that will attract employment and activity to the area. Many believe that this area should be the densest development area in the City, with taller buildings and a complete mix of uses.
- The established single-family neighborhoods within the study area are functioning well and, in some cases, are preserved by Historic District designation. These areas should not be subject to the FBC.
- Urban Village has great potential for redevelopment although many of the stakeholders mentioned the challenges of lack of road connectivity and existing stormwater issues.
- East Gainesville should be carefully considered in writing the FBC. There is great potential for this area to intensify, redevelop and become an attractor of mixed uses. Kennedy Homes is a prime target for redevelopment. Additional regulations, if too burdensome, would not be welcomed in East Gainesville.
- There was no clear opinion on how and when redevelopment of the Lowes/Walmart node along NW 13th Street should occur. Some of the interviewees believe that the buildings and area should be occupied as soon as possible and not subject to conformance with new FBC requirements which could be a deterrent to immediate occupancy. Others believe that this node is “ripe” for redevelopment based on more urban design principles and it is acceptable to require any new significant development or redevelopment on the site to conform to FBC standards when adopted.
- Depot Park and the Power District area will be a positive element of the City and should be carefully considered when writing the code.

Positive Qualities of Gainesville

- Trails and parks;
- The University of Florida;
- Quality of life in general;
- The established residential neighborhoods;
- Shands;
- Innovation Square; and
- Downtown.

Challenges for Gainesville

- Many believe the City is not “business-friendly”.
- The regulatory process for new development and redevelopment is burdensome (additional detail is provided in the section below).
- Additional road connectivity is needed, especially in an east/west direction through the City.
- East Gainesville should be carefully considered in the new FBC and not create additional economic or regulatory burdens for the area.
- Conflicts between the needs of students (parking, bicycle racks, sidewalks) and those of the surrounding neighborhoods and businesses.
- Achieving a proper balance between perceived “over-regulation” and quality development and growth.
- Affordable housing supply.
- Attracting quality new development and jobs.
- Funding for Bus Rapid Transit that will provide more mobility for residents.

Existing City Regulations and Development Approval Process

The interview team received the most comments and discussion on the issue of the City’s existing regulatory process and timeline. Across the board, all of the interviewees believe that most of the City’s existing Land Development Code (LDC) is outdated, difficult to use, and creates a burden on the business community. In addition, the required time to receive final development approval for most projects is excessive and costly. Most of the interviewees believe that the overall regulatory environment “drives business away” from the City. Additional detail is outlined below:

- The LDC is unclear and almost impossible to understand. It is extremely complex.
- The LDC has multiple internal inconsistencies.
- The approval process is two to three times longer than that of other competitive communities.
- Staff unevenly interprets and applies the code. Depending on which city planner is managing the development/zoning application, the outcome and requirements vary

widely, including the timeline, required steps, details for compliance and desired outcome.

- There are too many layers of regulation such as the Special Area Plans, Historic District, and multiple land use and zoning classifications for similar uses. The existing regulatory system is unclear and unpredictable. “No more overlays!”
- Too many waivers are required to undertake most development.
- Staff is not customer-centric.
- The City’s Legal Department is an impediment to the development approval process. The perception is that staff in that department delay decisions and take advantage of the lack of timeline requirements for review and decisions. The perceived result is delay and cost.
- The majority of those interviewed like the new UMU-2 zoning designation and believe that the development approval process for Innovation Square was timely, positive and appropriate.
- The large majority of the interviewees believe that a new Form-Based Code and streamlined LDC are necessary and should provide:
 - Clarity;
 - Predictability;
 - Transparency;
 - Flexibility;
 - Streamline and clarify the existing LDC and do not continue to “band aid” the code by constantly adopting new ordinances;
 - Ability for staff and the legal department to evenly interpret and apply the code provisions across all proposed development and redevelopment; and
 - An established and clear timeline that defines the application and approval process with deadlines for both the applicant and staff response all the way through the process. It must be shorter than the existing process.
- Allow for administrative approval of development that meets the FBC.
- Training should be provided for all staff that will be administering the FBC.

- Incorporate the principles and ideas of the existing SAPs into the FBC and delete the SAPs from the regulations.

Form and Density

For the most part, those interviewed are in favor of increased density within the Study Area, with the exception of the established single family residential neighborhoods, and believe that increased height and density would support multi-modal options for the City. They also would like to discourage green-field development and are supportive of redevelopment within the Study Area boundaries.

Conclusions

The information gathered during the interviews was extremely informative to the project team and will be invaluable in providing direction in development of a new FBC and revisions to the LDC. The interviews are only a part of the public input process which also includes 3 public workshops and a number of public meetings with the Plan Board and the City Commission. The City's website should provide this summary, as well as other information gathered from the public, to Gainesville residents.