

Notes from the East SoMa Public Workshop – February 13, 2007

Note: the list below is a compilation of comments made by individuals; the list doesn't necessarily imply community consensus around the points made.

Verbal Comments/Questions during the Large Session**Transportation (Peter Albert, Municipal Transportation Authority)**

- Comment: Pedestrian safety is critical for this area.
- Response: MTA is focused on traffic calming. They have identified some problem areas, but they'd like the communities' input on specific intersections and areas of concern.

- Comment: are you looking into maximizing revenues to provide services?
- Response: MUNI's Transit Effectiveness Project (TEP) is looking at all the routes and other factors of efficiency for the first time in 25 years. They're looking at fares, fare evasion, development fees for transit, and other ways to fund MUNI. Additionally, MTA will look at other ways to fund Muni.

- Comment: Is MUNI looking outside SoMa for revenue sources, such as the free parking that is provided in other areas of the city?
- Response: Yes

- Comment: If the 4th St light rail is to be built, there should be a stop at Brannan or Bryant to serve that community.
- Response: There is a stop proposed at that location.

- Comment: How will Folsom Blvd. be discussed, given that it runs through multiple plan areas?
- Response: It will be discussed with all groups. It will be discussed as a whole and MTA will be the point agency.

- Comment: What changes in the N-Judah do you expect with the opening of the T-line?
- Response: The N will stop at the Embarcadero. The T will go from the Castro down 3rd St. The J will stop at Caltrain. We don't expect everyone to be happy about this, and we can change as necessary, since the major infrastructure will be in place. They are already thinking about possible alternatives if this doesn't work.

- General response: Peter offered to be point person for people's concerns, and wants to improve service to an area that has a lot of transit but a lot of it is full by the time it gets to East SoMa.

Parks and Recreation (Daniel LaForte, Recreation & Parks Department)

- Comment: On 6th St., the only public restroom is at the Community Center at Folsom, and it is in terrible condition. What are you doing about this?
- Response: The Department engages the public in identifying deficiencies and maintenance repairs to City recreation facilities through the Department's capital programming process. We recognize the need for more bathrooms in East Soma and will take the necessary steps in our capital programming to address the issue.

Housing (Doug Shoemaker, Mayor's Office of Housing)

- Comment: Our document says that the affordable housing overlay zones will require a “substantial” amount of affordable housing. What is considered “substantial”?
- Response: Right now it’s 100%. However, we’re looking into doing less than 100% to get more development. We’ll work with the community before finalizing that amount.
- Comment: It’s not just about building affordable housing, it’s about where it goes. A disproportionate amount is going to East SoMa and the rest of the city needs to take their share.
- Response: Yes, East SoMa has a high amount of affordable housing, but it’s not disproportional to need (given the demographics). Also, in contrast to the comment, MoH’s investment is not disproportionately occurring in East SoMa. MoH is very supportive of spreading the affordable housing throughout the city.
- Comment: The SLI has not yielded any affordable housing.
- Response: We recognize this criticism. However, we must remember that the original purpose of the SLI was not as a housing district, but as a PDR-preservation district. Now, as housing production becomes more of a priority, we are looking at ways to make this happen. Additionally, we have received direction from the Board of Supervisors to create more affordable housing.
- Comment: When will we know the final affordability percentage?
- Response: We are crunching the numbers at present and expect to have this figure in time for our presentation to the Planning Commission in Mid-March.
- Comment: I don’t like affordable housing and the unforeseen consequences.
- Comment: When you increase development potential, it’s fair for the City to recapture some of that value. However, in the RSD there are “split lots” and restricted heights and so some parcels aren’t receiving much, so it’s unfair to recapture value.
- Response: The recapture will only occur to parcels to which we’re adding value, instead of being a district-wide strategy.
- Comment: Has the City Attorney been contacted about the ramifications of decreasing values by requiring affordable housing?
- Response: We’re not reducing values. In the East SoMa, the affordable housing overlay applies to all parcels that were originally zoned for affordable housing.
- Comment: Is the policy of raising heights a policy of the Mayor’s Office or of the Planning Department?
- Response: The Planning Department proposed the heights.

Public Benefits (Sarah Dennis, Planning Department)

- Comment: Priorities should be streets and sidewalks, which we all use, and then parks.
- Comment: Top priority should be arts and cultural facilities.
- Comment: Priorities should be pedestrian safety, otherwise we don't have a neighborhood.
- Comment: Priorities for the Filipino community are arts and neighborhood-serving retail.
- Comment: We're going to lose the old town feel and historic buildings to towers. Buildings should be a size people can relate to.
- Comment: issues in the area include noise (particularly from generators on buildings) and dogs (all the new green spaces are dog runs, and we need other kinds of space). Also, South Beach is not really a neighborhood, but it should be.
- Comment: There are lots of derelict buildings in the area. Can we fine owners or tax them for blighting the area?
- Response: There is no mechanism in place at this time, but it's a good suggestion and we will look into it.
- Comment: Public benefits require impact fees, but right now we have no mechanisms for collecting them. This plan would be a good start. We should set fees high and, as necessary, drop them.
- Comment: The City has no extra cash for public benefits (due to the war in Iraq, etc.). Thus, these come from development fees. The SLI would yield no fees, plus would keep this area an economic backwater and not a dynamic neighborhood like South Beach or Mission Bay.
- Comment: The Planning Commission is granting exemptions from requirements, which minimizes our chance to collect revenue.

Land Use and Zoning (Sue Exline)

- Comment: Eliminating parking is not a good idea, because it's unsafe to walk in the neighborhood.
- Comment: during baseball season, people park illegally in South Park. Also, because there are no streetlights on Jack London, there's more theft. Finally, we need at least one car per unit.
- Comment: I agree 99% on the zoning and the Plan except the Ballpark parking is a disaster. It burdens the folks who already live there. Thus, we need 1:1 parking in residential areas. It's a pipedream to think people won't have a car.

- Regardless of requirements or rules doesn't the Planning Commission still grant exceptions to developers for the provision of open space and parking?
- Response: Variances are provided in certain cases and we would like to make sure that if a variance is granted that there is an in-lieu fee that provides for open space if it's not provided on-site.
- Comment: South Beach and Mission Bay are locations with a neighborhood. They need traditional shopping streets. Maybe a NCT on 2nd and other areas?
- Comment: In MU, 5,000 SF of office per parcel (and 10,000 with a CU) is a lot. Offices were disallowed before. Opening this area up to offices and housing will push out PDR, because they can't pay office or housing rates.
- Comment: PDR is leaving because there's not enough demand and there's 4 million square feet of vacant space. Too much PDR will make this an economic backwater.
- Comment: there should be different design standards for new construction than for remodeling.
- Question: What does asterisk at bottom of page 11 mean and what is the thinking?
- Response: It means that dot com or computer related businesses would not be allowed under the definition of home and business services.
- Comment: there was a comment about family businesses competing with larger or newer businesses in the ground floor space requirement
- Comment: nighttime entertainment should be a Conditional Use, not Not Permitted.
- Comment: PDR costs got to high and a viable PDR business had to move to Sacramento.

Urban Design (Andres Power)

- **Comment.** Current height controls allow a Conditional Use to bring heights up to 85 feet in the RSD. Will conditional use still be tool to bring heights higher than the proposed height controls illustrate?
 - **Response:** Using conditional use to build higher was allowed only if additional affordable housing was provided - a process that was abused. Conditional use to allow greater heights will not be allowed under the current proposal.
- **Comment.** Some of the lots are split and the value is actually being reduced on these lots, so how can you ask for additional affordable housing?
 - **Response:** The splits provide additional height on portions of the property while protecting alleys and view-sheds. The provision of this additional height adds value to the parcel, and in such, we will require additional affordable housing.

- **Comment.** Why are you raising the heights west of 4th street in East SoMa if the policy says that heights west of 4th street should remain low? Also, the Urban Design element of the General Plan says that higher heights along the freeway are not appropriate. This raises a lot of health, livability, and environmental justice issues.
 - **Response:** The parcels along the freeway west of 4th street are not within the boundaries of East SoMa and therefore this plan does not affect their height. The heights of buildings on the north side of Harrison Street, although not directly fronting the freeway, are part of the East SoMa plan area and are kept lower to reflect this policy. In regards to restricting all development on parcels near the freeway, if we were to follow this rule blindly, a huge swath of the city would be off-limits to housing. While health and livability concerns are very important considerations and are germane to the discussion, we need to balance this against the need for housing. We will continue to consider these issues as the plan moves forward.

- **Comment.** Zoning should not only dictate the number of parking spots but the sizes of those spots. This could be used to encourage smaller cars or Vespas.
 - **Response:** Although parking requirements are eliminated in the plan, regulating the size of parking spots that are built is an interesting proposition and will be looked at further.

- **Comment.** 55 feet is not a height that is allowable by current City of San Francisco building code.
 - **Response:** We are aware of this and are working with the Department of Building Inspection and the Fire Department to resolve this conflict.

- **Comment.** We are planning a project that meets all the urban design standards yet applying the affordable housing overlay to the SLI places a brake on our project.
 - **Response:** Affordable housing has always been a requirement of the SLI district. In other words, the affordable housing requirement in the 'affordable housing overlay' is not new. Affordable housing is an important and required component of East SoMa's fabric, and we strongly believe that both urban design and affordable housing requirements can be met in a successful and livable development.

- **Comment.** Lowering the heights from 85' to 55' between 3rd and 4th at Zoe St provides a dramatic rather than a stair-step height difference. Instead, these 55' parcels should be increased to 65' so that the heights transition better from the existing 85' building on 4th and Freelon.
 - **Response:** Given the confluence of multiple alleys at this location, promoting a lower building height will allow for greater sunlight access and an improved pedestrian condition on these alleys. Additionally, the height difference between 85 feet and 55 feet is a common transitional condition across the City.

- **Comment.** We are concerned that increasing the heights will obliterate the historic nature of the South End Historic District. Can you include a notification caveat and codify a historic protection clause?
 - **Response:** Allowable heights do not trump historic preservation standards. We will still apply the Secretary of the Interior criteria for historic resources when additional heights or significant changes to the exterior of a building are proposed. Also, until the survey is completed, all potential sites will be considered significant. The Planning Department agrees that the South End Historic District is a valuable element of the City’s urban fabric and that its unique character should be protected.

- **Comment.** The proposed guidelines speak to the breaking-up of large parcels with alleys. Would the alley controls apply to these newly created alleys?
 - **Response:** Yes, new alleys that provide auto and pedestrian access would need to satisfy the alley controls.

- **Comment.** The development “The Palms” shouldn’t be the rule but the exception.
 - **Response:** Bulk controls will be applied to ensure that straight-line building extrusions do not become the norm.

Written/Survey Responses

16 surveys collected, not all respondents filled out every survey question:

1. The Preliminary Affordable Housing Strategy in the Eastern Neighborhoods

- a. The affordable housing strategy is an important component of the Eastern Neighborhoods Planning Process; do you understand the strategy and the approach for encouraging the production of affordable housing?

Number of respondents who checked the boxes below followed by comments:

Yes – 6 For the most part – 3 Somewhat – 2 Not at all – 1

- Yes, why create an economic ghetto? It is counter productive and unfair to prop. owners.
- Unsure how the affordable housing overlay zones may operate.
- Why 100% (affordable housing)!
- I comprehend the strategy although the percentage of required affordable housing is excessive.
- The planning of last six years has gone out the window with the latest plan. Why? Is there a strategy to increase tax revenues from the area to pay for services?
- Yes, however, why are the designers so ready to “sell out” to developers planning a giant tower for a few affordable housing units? often in Neighborhoods where the cost of living is beyond their reach.
- Difficult to evaluate with no proposed percentages, including existing mix, forecasted mix without the strategy etc.
- Yes, the theory; the reality, not at all, - nobody will build it because it is cost prohibitive.

- What's housing and how much of it.
 - Why is rent control so neglected?
- b. Do you think the preliminary affordable housing strategy presented tonight represents a balanced approach toward providing an adequate amount of affordable housing to the community?

Number of respondents who checked the boxes below followed by comments:

Yes – 2 ; For the most part – 2; Somewhat – 2; Not at all – 6; Don't Know - 1

- I think by making 100% affordable housing you will halt all projects. There will be more affordable housing available if you allowed for Market rate housing with 15% affordable housing, which is what the general city plan requires.
 - Are you kidding?
 - It seems the East Soma is expected to carry a larger burden for affordable housing, where other neighborhoods have almost no affordable units.
 - Conflict between overlay and existing units held up due to on-going zoning discussions.
 - A balanced approach would not require wide blocks that prohibit market rate housing altogether. Greater heights (85ft) adjacent to freeway will encourage housing. Allowing mergers will create critical mass and encourage more housing.
 - Overlay zones: I am in favor of keeping it 100% but experimenting with smaller quotas on a limited, case-by-case basis.
 - I still believe east and south of market are targeted areas for affordable housing because of it's industrial component that doesn't exist in other neighborhoods.
 - Will result in keeping development at a minimum, Therefore will preserve existing high levels of affordable housing in the area.
 - No, it is a unit a unilateral forced requirement upon those who do not agree with it and will not build what is proposed a forced taking that is arguably unconstitutional.
 - I prefer mixed-use housing. Provide density bonuses.
 - What kind of housing will go into the SLI and the RED zone area.
 - Don't know because I am still vague on the strategy
- c. Can you think of other strategies for increasing affordable housing production?
- If nothing is built, you will have zero affordable housing. 15% is greater than 0.
 - Dilute it and spread it all over the city.
 - Much more financing available for development.
 - Currently, there are no incentives for developers to embrace affordable housing, only burdens.
 - Encourage more market-rate housing that will produce inclusionary housing or in-lieu fees for affordable housing. Provide density bonus for affordable housing, including bonus for market rate housing that provides 15% affordable.
 - Buy up abandoned buildings in all neighborhoods.
 - More housing will increase affordability, simple supply and demand.
 - Yes! Increase residential densities for market rate housing in exchange for higher affordability %ages within those new residential buildings requirements.
 - Yes, increasing developer fees don't allow them to add any more height to their plan.

- Rent control would keep rents affordable while owners can raise empty units to market value.
- d. What kind of housing do you think is most needed in this area?
- $\frac{3}{4}$ Market rate and $\frac{1}{4}$ affordable.
 - Town House/Duplexes
 - True people bring vibrancy to neighborhood. To make affordable housing viable from a development standpoint, construction quality tends to be diminished. A true mix of homes allows/encourages and higher caliber of construction. Quality built environment is key to successful neighborhood nice buildings cost money.
 - I agree that both affordable and market rate are needed to address community needs. Excessive affordable housing will shut down all housing => “Balance”
 - A mix of housing of difficult ranges to avoid ghettoization. No areas just for affordable housing-no more than 50% required on every other block. This requirement is a recipe for no growth.
 - Middle-class
 - Work force housing and mixed use
 - A mix of market-rate and affordable. Allow the former and require the latter along with it.
 - Mixed use. Lets not pile all the low-income folks into one project; diversify the housing projects.
 - Extended families housing and town bedrooms apartments.
 - I strongly feel that these should not be anymore SRO housing in the area of 6th Street.
 - Rent control SRO, single bed, double bedrooms, three bedrooms and studios /forget lofts.

2. *The Public Benefits Package*

- a. Do you feel the all the needs were identified? If not, can you tell us what is missing?
- Number of respondents who checked the boxes below followed by comments:**
Yes – 5 ; For the most part – 3; Somewhat – 4; Not at all – 1; Don’t Know - 0
- A substantive recognition of community input.
 - Security/Police; Beautification
 - Funding will continue to be an issue. Both taxation and developer funding will be needed to fund these programs in the long run.
 - Who is going to pay for benefit packages? Developers? Owners?
 - We should encourage development that generates funding particularly property taxes.
 - Recognition of reality that supply and demand move market rate housing will favorably affect affordability.
 - Each new project that will come to Soma, it will help pay for more housing.
 - Everything seemed rushed. Example: The transportation chat dealt with the N Judah because an audience member brought it up but no word was raised about the 15 line demise.

- Places of worship: Whether they are purely physical facilities where various religious groups can share the space (i.e. Jewish, Christian, Jehovah witness, etc.) for their worship activities.
- b. The different funding mechanisms or methods outlined today (impact fees, etc.) may not be able to cover all of the needs for the Public Benefits Improvements Program over the 20-year life of the Plan. Which needs would you qualify as being the top priorities for East SoMa? If one of your top needs does not appear on the Needs List please add it:
 - Improved public bathrooms.
 - Fines for Derelict Property. Fines should be imposed on owner of commercial spaces who do not maintain their property-Many derelict buildings in area = Blight and Dangerous.
 - If revitalization is to occur then some change should be encouraged. Do not create huge financial barriers to improving a neighborhood. There needs to be tax base financing also.
 - Parks, Streets, and Traffic.
 - Parking lot, Better MUNI, Public Restrooms
 - Design sense, parking, use abandoned schools for parking in the evening.
 - If we are eliminating parking spaces, will there be plans for Free shuttle services for local neighborhood residents that are located not very close to public transportation?
 - Preservation of Filipino Community, which includes arts and cultural facilities, social and human services.
 - Where is the list? 1) Neighborhood Pool; 2) Neighborhood medical clinics set up by UCSF; 3) Pedestrian walkways. 4) Quiet Road surfaces.

3. *Proposed Zoning Controls (Planning Code Amendments)*

- a. Do you understand the purpose of the zoning districts and what they do?
Number of respondents who checked the boxes below followed by comments:
Yes – 5; For the most part – 4; Somewhat – 4; Not at all – 1;
 - Clarify the mixed-use ratio of residential to other- clearly state that all residential is allowable.
 - Not clear what percent of housing in affordable overlay area is supposed to be affordable.
 - Night-time entertainment is an historic part of SoMa. Suggest zoning this use as “C” instead of “NP” in all SOMA zoning districts. The Castro is being similarly killed this way.
 - The height increase restrictions have a net negative impact on split height lots. Please lots should 1) still be permitted to seek a call for 85 foot heights and should not have one “increased affordability” applied to the prior “by-right” heights.
 - Affordable housing overlays seem unnecessary.
 - South of Market zoning is just fine, my neighborhood are doing fine. So don’t come and change anything.

- b. Given the overall community goal of keeping SoMa a mixed-use community, are the boundaries of the zoning districts generally appropriate?

Number of respondents who checked the boxes below followed by comments:

Yes – 1; For the most part – 4; Somewhat – 4; Not at all – 0; Don't Know - 3

- Affordable housing overlay is extremely restrictive and will halt any development.
- Areas west of freeway should be consistent and blend with existing character of neighborhood should be mixed use residential and office not affordable overlay.
- No, why is a giant tower with 36 units allowed to be built on my alley and the proposed building only has to provide 9 parking spaces when the Westfield and turn on ramp to freeway and baseball, club traffic is already out of control.
- Totally opposed to “affordable overlay,” but good attention to boulevard aesthetics (i.e. Folsom Street greening).
- By protecting the PDR space and leave the RED area alone. This way our community will remain whole.

4. THE AREA PLAN - For each of the following community goals, please let us know: *how well do you think the objectives and policies in the Draft East SoMa Area Plan address each goal?*

1. Encourage an appropriate mix of uses

Number of respondents who checked the boxes below followed by comments:

Very well – 1; For the most part – 5; Somewhat – 1; Not at all – 2; Don't Know - 2

- Recent job of retaining bushes, but emphasis on light industrial is unrealistic in today's economy.
- Should zone night-time entertainment as “C” to retain these parts of the SOMA neighborhood.
- But from the plans I don't see that happening.
- Set aside more commercial space for small business so they can move in.
- More retailing along arterial streets but “gracious” retail space should not include excess (i.e.> 10ft.) Height requirements.

2. Retain and promote businesses and organizations that contribute to the diversity of the neighborhood

Number of respondents who checked the boxes below followed by comments:

Very well – 0; For the most part – 4; Somewhat – 6; Not at all – 0; Don't Know - 2

- In this plan there is no room to keep our neighborhood diverse, not with market rate housing coming in.
- Affordability overlay will not work.

3. Encourage more neighborhood-serving businesses?

Number of respondents who checked the boxes below followed by comments:

Very well – 0; For the most part – 4; Somewhat – 6; Not at all – 0; Don't Know - 2

- The Planning Department plans are not small-business friendly right now.
- I do not have a problem with chain business such as Starbucks being in the area. They would certainly help out the economics of the 6th street corridor.

4. Attract jobs for local residents?

Number of respondents who checked the boxes below followed by comments:

Very well – 1; For the most part – 3; Somewhat – 6; Not at all – 1; Don't Know - 2

- Consider for more PDR
- More mixed-use zoning would produce more productive use, less deterioration, and more jobs.
- The so call new jobs don't cover the youth and disabled [sic]. The high paying jobs just go to people with a Master and PhD.

5. Encourage a mix of incomes in renter- and owner-occupied housing?

Number of respondents who checked the boxes below followed by comments:

Very well – 5; For the most part – 3; Somewhat – 5; Not at all – 5; Don't Know - 1

- Large areas are zoned only for affordable housing-that will result in no housing at all. Mixed income areas might actually produce housing.
- No attention was given in the meeting to rental housing.
- The rent control units are not being covered under this new plan.

6. Increase affordable housing opportunities?

Number of respondents who checked the boxes below followed by comments:

Very well – 0; For the most part – 3; Somewhat – 2; Not at all – 5; Don't Know - 1

- Too much Affordable Housing for this area
- Your vision will actually restrict affordable housing by stopping development
- The affordable overlay doesn't work. The overlay is a continuation of the old SLI rules which permit affordable housing but do not permit other housing. The result not a stick of affordable housing in the SLI area kind. 1990.
- Cut back on building new market rate housing. When new development comes around say no.

7. Improve the character of streets and encourage pedestrian safety?

Number of respondents who checked the boxes below followed by comments:

Very well – 1; For the most part – 7; Somewhat – 2; Not at all – 1; Don't Know - 1

- Reset the time for those that use the cross walk.
- Please see my attached letter (Note: no attached letter received).

8. Improve community facilities and enhance open spaces?

Number of respondents who checked the boxes below followed by comments:

Very well – 1; For the most part – 7; Somewhat – 0; Not at all – 1; Don't Know - 1

- Area needs far more Open Space-Parks
- Good ideas from audience and staff.

9. Provide adequate transit service and gracious streets for all modes of moving about?

Number of respondents who checked the boxes below followed by comments:

Very well – 0; For the most part – 6; Somewhat – 1; Not at all – 1; Don't Know - 1

- Keep N Judah as is 2/07. There are no gracious streets as of now except Ebarc. Remainder are sub-standard dirty and not attractive or conducive to walking. Need street patrol- police-walking, not in squad cars only.
- We don't need more retail with the existence of all these new shopping centers.
- Parking is an impossible problem.
- Bring the 4th Street light rail above ground with stops.
- I think that there should be an electric trolley car line running the length of Folsom street.

10. Other comments, including related to workshop format, outreach, materials, etc:

- a. Was the format appropriate for the content of tonight's workshop?

Number of respondents who checked the boxes below followed by comments:

Yes – 3; For the most part – 4; Somewhat – 4; Not at all – 0; Don't Know - 0

- When presenters become uncomfortable with comments made by the audience the presenters tried to shut down audience members this made me feel that the planners only want to hear positive input on their plan they truly didn't want to hear what everyone wanted to say.
 - Yes, but there is a lot of misunderstandings, around community.
 - The affair seemed rushed, no specifics. So much to cover so little time.
- b. Do you have suggestions for other formats?
- Presents don't have answers or each data. We need a Planning commission or supervisor present to respond.
 - Video presentations, questions after, T.V.? I don't get the SF station
- c. Typically, the Planning Department mails out cards, sends e-mail announcements to a mailing list and sends flyers to community and neighborhood organizations; what other means could we consider for future outreach and future meetings related to this or other planning efforts?
- Could you post the process/calendar on the website?
 - Send mailer to all property owners.
 - They are bullshiting
 - T.V. network (local) prime time bulletin boards.
- d. Do you think the materials used for the workshop were sufficient, appropriate and accessible?

Number of respondents who checked the boxes below followed by comments:

Yes – 4; For the most part – 4; Somewhat – 3; Not at all – 0; Don't Know - 1

- Mistake on mixed use, which turned into affordable housing overlay just five days before workshop!
- e. Do you have any suggestions as to what else we could provide?
- Supervisors present and the mayor present at the meeting. I think there is a missing link between planning department, supervisors and mayor.
 - I hope there were note takers from the Planning Dept.
 - Please continue to include us in the planning process.
 - General comment: Timeline for completion?!
 - Planning staff count not give answers too our question.

f. Do you think the presentation was (check all that apply):

Number of respondents who checked the boxes below followed by comments:

Too long – 4; OK – 4; Too short - 2, Too basic - 1, unclear – 1