

North Old Town / Chinatown Redevelopment Strategy

Background Materials for the SAC WORKSHOP #2 – 14 November 2006

Additional Stakeholder / Community Interviews – Mid Project Report

In addition to collaborating on this project with the SAC, our consultant team interviewed several other stakeholders and community members. This group included those active in a variety of community initiatives (many with decades of involvement), area business and property owners, and representatives from social service agencies and cultural organizations. In addition to individual interviews, our team sought information from a number of people on specific aspects of the study.

This mid-project report highlights the main points offered by the people contacted to-date. It particularly concentrates on comments and information that will be helpful to the discussions to be held at the 2nd SAC meeting on November 14, 2006. This report is not intended to provide a scientifically valid or all-encompassing profile of community opinion.

Summary of Findings To-Date

1) Key elements of a redevelopment strategy in the north OTCT focus area to help create a “vibrant, mixed-use, 24 hr/day urban neighborhood, rooted in a rich historical past”:

- Create a northern gateway into the area that augments the Chinatown identity and supports the artistic, cultural, historical, and educational assets of OTCT as a whole;
- Enliven the street level with ground floor retail and good access to buildings; develop pedestrian friendly routes between important blocks and destinations, including into downtown Portland;
- Develop workforce housing (most common definition was between 80-120% of median family income/mfi) to have a critical mass of people who invest in OTCT by living there, and who will support local businesses.

2) Opportunities:

This is a forgotten area (a doughnut hole), one that is ripe for redevelopment and which has opportunities for people to have a real impact on positively defining the area. It's been overlooked; it's time to fill in the hole.

- The Autumn Festival showed that people are willing to come to this area for authentic cultural experiences. People are attracted to the Garden and the culture/history of OTCT. More businesses that support the mission of the Garden would enhance the experience;
- New and potential initiatives in the surrounding area (e.g. University of Oregon, Arts Bldg., Mercy Corps, small creative work spaces, Pacific NW College of Art, Light Rail, bus/train station developments, festival streets) can bring benefits, vitality, and activity to the redeveloped northern area of OTCT;
- We can do more to encourage and recruit for private investments (local, foreign, etc.)
- Transit options, the U of O, and proximity to downtown core, eastside, and riverfront make the area desirable for workforce housing.

3) Challenges:

Some type of gentrification will happen if the area develops. How do we develop vibrantly, but not lose the character of the area?

- Parking;
- Perception of danger and drugs;

- Cleanliness issues, loitering, queuing detracts from the visitor experience and lessens the desirability for those considering living here or having a business here;
- Besides a visit to the Portland Classical Chinese Garden and eating lunch, there's not much of a Chinatown left and not much along those lines to do;
- Lack of area residents with disposable income;
- Businesses will look for already-developed spaces and stable areas to locate; OTCT streets have been torn up for years and will continue to be due to Light Rail.

4) What's missing from today's business mix to meet customer needs? What are the top priorities for new ventures?

Several ideas were put forth, including: a high end, well-run Asian restaurant with private banquet room space; a boutique-type hotel with meeting space; local small businesses such as jewelry stores, coffee shops and professional personal services. A grocery store or market, particularly one that was Asian-oriented or even a destination-type (e.g. Uwajimaya's) but there were questions about whether a large grocery store would be viable.

5) With limited future public funding available to assist developments, what types of projects should receive priority?

- Parking – subsidize development; do a cost/benefit analysis of parking;
- Development of small business spaces; development of buildings that have small business-owned spaces; enhancements for current businesses;
- Seismic upgrades to conserve historic buildings;
- Community center and/or cultural center space (varying opinions as to what this means, how the space would be managed and how operating costs would be paid);
- Destination open spaces and/or natural spaces.

6) Blanchet House:

There was overall support for Blanchet House to stay in the area and provide their service in a facility that is appropriate and designed to accommodate their work and be a good neighbor. Many felt that if BH stayed in its current site it would be detrimental for the revitalization of the north focus area because we would lose the opportunity for one of the few full-block developments in OTCT. Generally, interviewees supported the current social services in the area but voiced concern about and potential opposition to substantial expansions and additional facilities.