

Crown Motel Redevelopment Public Meeting
January 23, 2007
Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center

To continue to involve the public in the development process of the Crown Motel site in the Interstate Corridor Urban Renewal Area, a public meeting was held on January 23, 2007 at the IFCC. This meeting was an opportunity for representatives from the Portland Development Commission (PDC), REACH Community Development (REACH), TriMet, and SERA Architects to inform residents on the current status of the project and to receive comments, ideas, and concerns from community residents.

INTRODUCTION

- Portland Development Commission:

Kate Deane from PDC described PDC's role as facilitator and partial financier of quality community development in the Interstate Urban Renewal Area (URA). Kate noted PDC participation in the development of Killingsworth Station nearby and commented on its complimentary nature in achieving PDC affordable housing goals.

- REACH Community Development Inc.

Michelle Haynes from REACH described REACH's role as the developer of the project. She reiterated that the project is envisioned as a multi-family, rental-housing project that would be affordable to residents who earn less than 50% of the area Median Family Income (MFI). REACH emphasized their considerable experience in developing and managing affordable, multi-family housing units in Portland, including in North Portland (Albina Corner and McCuller Crossing), and that one benefit of having REACH involved in the development of the project is the assurance of a 24-hour presence at the site and vigilant management of the property.

- SERA Architects:

Kurt Schultz from SERA Architects commented on the project selection process and SERA's role in project. He announced SERA's commitment towards realizing PDC, REACH and TriMet's goals for the project as well as continuing an active dialogue with neighborhood residents. SERA Architects asked the community to remember that the project is still in its beginning stages and that community input is important during this phase. As an example, it was mentioned that the current design scheme reflects community input regarding setbacks, shadow impact, location of retail, and parking. Kurt commented that SERA has received direction from the neighborhood that it would like to see the Crown Motel neon sign saved and somehow incorporated on the facade of the new project. He said SERA and REACH will explore options for reconditioning the sign as the project design is refined.

SUMMARY OF PROJECT ELEMENTS AND HOUSING MIX

- Affordable Rental Housing:

REACH commented that rents for the apartments will all be set to be affordable to tenants with incomes at 45-50% of Portland area median income (MFI). REACH has completed a market study which shows that existing market rents in the Interstate area are affordable to tenants with incomes at or slightly above 50% MFI. Since rents in the new Crown project will be kept affordable for at least 60 years, it will help to mitigate potential displacement of current Overlook residents resulting from new developments and rising property costs in the Interstate Corridor. For example, most one bedroom units will rent initially for about \$550 for 1BR and two bedrooms will rent for about \$650.

- Section 8 Housing:

Funding issues for the project were also discussed at the meeting. REACH informed the community that because they failed to secure state tax credits for the project they were working with PDC on ways to ensure that the project remains feasible. One suggestion to close the funding gap was the inclusion of project-based Section 8 Rental Assistance subsidies for some apartments.

Leah Greenwood of PDC explained the nature of Section 8 housing and potential financial impacts of designating some component of this project as Section 8. She discussed the differences between tenant-based and unit-based Section 8. She informed the community that if this project didn't contain a Section 8 component that PDC would be looking to achieve it in another project in or near the neighborhood. She explained that at most, 12 out of the 54 apartments in the building would have project-based Section 8 subsidies.

Michelle Haynes of REACH added that the inclusion of Section 8 rent subsidies would help families with incomes under 30% MFI to live at the Crown in apartments they could not otherwise afford. She noted that displacement of larger families with children is a serious problem in the Overlook and Interstate Avenue area, and the rent subsidies would allow some of these families to stay in their neighborhood.

- Homeownership:

Michelle Haynes addressed the loss of the home ownership component of the project. Several factors contributed to this change and are as follows: 1) PDC was developing a similar project nearby in the Interstate URA for home ownership 2) The cost of developing multiple buildings and subdividing the Crown property 3) Lack of space for on-site parking 4) Physical constraints of the site to accommodate both home ownership and rental units.

- Parking:

Michelle Haynes highlighted changes in the design that increase on-site parking spaces over the previous design. She further commented that this project will provide more parking than typical REACH projects (and also more than code-minimum) The parking, together with transit passes and other measures to encourage transit use, should adequately provide for tenant parking needs.

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION AND QUESTIONS

- Family Housing and Property Management:

Becky Crew, REACH's head of Property Management, addressed community questions about potential problems presented by tenants of Section 8 rental housing. Becky commented that the major benefit REACH brings to the project is its 24-hour presence and vigilant management involvement. She explained REACH's management style and showcased successes of past projects. She further explained REACH's rigorous applicant screening process and who would and wouldn't be able to rent in the project.

Michelle Haynes addressed community questions over the seemingly small number of two bedroom units in the project. She noted that REACH is proposing to build 16 family (2 and 3 bedroom) units out of 54 total units. She explained that REACH is proposing to include only 4 two bedroom apartments because there is already a relatively large supply of two bedroom units in the neighborhood. On the other hand, REACH is proposing to build 12 3-bedroom units in the project, because such apartments are very scarce in the Interstate URA.

Becky addressed community concern about occupancy standards. She explained REACH's standards for maximum number of tenants per unit as 2 per bedroom, but stated that maximums are rarely, if ever reached for family units.

Michelle addressed community concerns that project size was driven by URA density goals. She assured the community that 50+ units is required for financial feasibility of providing quality 24-hour management which REACH understood to be very important to the community.

- Quality of materials, design and sustainability:

Several community members expressed their desire for assurances that the development would be of a high quality, both aesthetically and materially. Kurt Schultz assured the community that current design includes the same high-quality of materials which were initially envisioned for the project. He emphasized that a good design and quality construction are essential to the project being considered successful. He explained that the current scheme responds to financial fluctuations in a manner which efficiently uses structure in order to provide quality aesthetic and finishes.

Leah Greenwood clarified that quality materials are required in all PDC funded projects. She emphasized that a key consideration when making changes to the project design and unit mix is ensuring adequate resources to maintain the quality design and materials rather than having to "value-engineer" those out. She also emphasized the importance of continued community involvement throughout the project's design phases.

Kurt addressed a question regarding how "green" or environmentally sustainable, the building will be. Kurt explained the project team's decision to forego the costs of the documentation required to submit for LEED certification in order to maximize investment into sustainable measures while maintaining the project as affordable family rental housing. REACH expects to build the project to sustainable standards commensurate with a LEED-Silver designation.

- Project Funding:

Kate Deane addressed community comments over the specifics of PDC funding within the project. REACH originally hoped to get state money to partially finance the project, but their Crown application did not receive state approval this year. PDC can fill the resulting funding gap using tax increment funds from the Interstate URA. But this may require PDC to shift money from other projects in the Interstate URA in order to fund the Crown project. The use of project-based Section 8 rent subsidies for the Crown project will help keep the funding shifts to a minimum. A number of community members requested that PDC increase its funding for the project so project-based Section 8 rent subsidies would not be needed. Kate Deane commented that there are many priorities in the Interstate Corridor that have to be balanced and adding even more PDC funding to the Crown Motel would require other projects in the neighborhood to go unfunded.

- Demolition of Motel:

Many community members expressed concern about the current use of the motel and seemingly illegal activity that continues. They asked why TriMet couldn't vacate the building and begin demolition now. Phil Selinger of TriMet explained that the purchase agreement for the property links demolition of the current building with the acquiring a building permit for development of the new project. TriMet pledged to explore neighborhood concerns about illegal activity occurring on the property, but noted that police action is required by law in order to take action against offenders.

PUBLIC INPUT AND COMMENTS

Following the meeting, community members were asked to provide written comments to the questions:

“What features of our proposed project work best for the Overlook community and Interstate Avenue?”

- Demolition of motel. How about Mel’s?
- Are there provisions to alleviate traffic concerns? Traffic making a quick right on Sumner to connect to Maryland to shift traffic how – can we think of speed bumps?
- Active on-site management of the units
- The retail space, the green building of the project, the landscaping between the building & neighbors to the east
- More eyes on Patton Park
- I like how “tight” it is to Interstate Ave. I like the retail offers and the use of the park.
- Retail space w/ outside seating looking towards the park is great.
- Family oriented affordable housing. Neighborhood oriented retail.
- To date, strong, logical design that appears to balance needs/goals well. Very good massing and layout that really help the street frontages.
- I like the commercial space idea. I’m looking forward to seeing the ground broken!
- Classy look. Nice retail space. Good use of building vs. public space (park).

What are your top three priorities for development of the site?

Design and Construction:

- Efficient construction as proposed – no surprises!
- Garbage, lighting, plantings as proposed and promised.
- Architectural integration into the existing community.
- Quality building materials and design
- Needs to be physically accessible by neighbors & public.
- Keep the “Crown” sign
- Would like to see a lot of landscape design and trees around building

Management:

- Maintaining safety in building and neighborhood.
- Management of the property 24 hour
- Low impact on surrounding neighbors
- Well maintained building,
- Quickly responding to issues once it’s constructed
- Strict screening of the tenants of the building
- Keep people in N Portland. I know there is concern about the tenants, but I don’t want to be surrounded by people from the Pearl District. If I did, “T” would move there!

Type of Housing:

- Remains a family housing building
- Mix of income and residents
- No section 8 housing

Other:

- Vouchers for transportation for the tenants b/c \$1.70 a ride is far too expensive for low-income families.

- Desirable retailers
- Adequate parking space for the tenants
- Getting it built
- Financial feasibility

Are there any issues you want to see addressed as our project progresses?

- Aggressive options for funding w/out having to take Section 8 \$\$\$; This project can proceed without Section 8 so why have it?
- Parking w/ the retail space & # of units
- More beautiful building - right now it looks like every new dev, would like to see something original;
- Will “green” features be incorporated into the project? Such as storm H2O runoff being used on site for landscaping etc; Make the building green
- Current, ongoing crime
- Why can’t there be condos? Why can’t apartments be more market rate - 50% or higher of med income?
- Minimize excess impact on neighborhood during construction
- I don’t think the difference between .5 and .6 parking ratios is that important.
- Do not value engineer quality out of the building - good job so far
- If owner units could be re-incorporated that’d be great.
- Really like the vertical elements (incl. glass corners & brick-clad slab) that break up the mass of the building
- Make sure the project is financially feasible and occupied by both residential and commercial tenants.
- Will the construction of the lot impact the traffic on interstate and for how long
- Will the building be a gated facility?
- Design looks “dull” – it’s a slab – can you incorporate different elevations & rooflines – make it fit in more w/ the neighborhood

What else would you like the development team to know?

- The Crown should be represented for all urban growth. Wouldn’t it be amazing to see an urban renewal/low-income/mass transit article in Dwell magazine, for instance?
- Access to I-5 on ramp at Alberta will generate more traffic south on Maryland – can Maryland and Montana streets get speed control measures (bumps? etc).
- I like the idea of the building being REACH managed to insure quality tenants.
- Interstate is a busy & noisy street – minimize part facing interstate
- This isn’t the Pearl District
- Is covered parking feasible? Could be a way to step the project down
- Community is making too big a deal of section 8 – people can rent there w/Section 8 vouchers because it’s publicly funded!
- I would like to see the tone of this project to be an example for future building and development on interstate and am concerned that if section 8 housing is introduced right off that it will be a negative impact for future development – why start off thinking low instead of high? More developers would be more likely to come over to Interstate if there is a higher standard first off.
- Please don’t make this project look cheap.
- This will be one of the first new developments on interstate going in so make it nice!!!

- Keep neighbors informed of progress
- Your skills, talents and enthusiasm for this project are showing. Keep up the good work! And thanks for acting on the feedback. Great team.
- I'm really excited to see this project developed. I'm interested in leasing the property in the retail space!
- Just so you know, I'm FINE with it being Section 8! Please don't let this project DIE just because of Section 8!
- Use "Top Hammer" general contracting for finish carpentry!