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## MEMO

**DATE:** June 12, 2020

**TO:** Mayor Ted Wheeler, Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty, Commissioner Chloe Eudaly, Commissioner Amanda Fritz

**FROM:** Rachael Hoy, BPS Senior Planner

**CC:** Sallie Edmunds, Supervising Planner, Joe Zehnder, Chief Planner

**SUBJECT:** Summary of CC2035 Re-Adoption Plan Testimony

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This memo provides a summary of written and oral testimony submitted to the Portland City Council in association with the public hearing held May 28, 2020 for the re-adoption of the Central City 2035 Plan.

Thirty people offered oral testimony at the hearing and 146 pieces of written testimony were submitted by the Thursday, June 4th deadline.

The main themes from the testimony are summarized as follows:

### **I. Testimony in Support for Re-adoption of the Plan**

**Maximum heights in the New Chinatown/Japantown Historic District.** Numerous individuals as well as representatives of the Old Town/Chinatown Neighborhood Association (OTCA) and Lan Su Classical Chinese Garden testified in support of the proposed maximum height limits for both the area north of NE Everett as well as Block 33. The testimony addressed the following themes:

- New Chinatown/Japantown is primarily a cultural district that celebrates the namesake cultures. The greater neighborhood also recognizes and celebrates other cultures important to Portland's evolution. These characteristics of the district would not be impacted by the proposed height limits.



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1900 SW 4th Avenue, Suite 7100, Portland, OR 97201 | phone: 503-823-7700 | fax: 503-823-7800 | tty: 503-823-6868

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- The OTCA supports re-adoption of Central City 2035 and the need to provide regulatory certainty for the development community, and specifically the ability to develop key catalytic sites, such as Block 33, to bring in a denser and more diverse mix of uses, and to reduce the conditions of blight that effect businesses within the district.
- The addition of workforce and market rate housing, designed to represent key cultural themes of the district such a Japanese and Chinese architecture, can help to create a safe, active and vibrant district with a balance of residents across economic demographics.
- The recently adopted New Chinatown/Japantown and Skidmore Old Town design guidelines, include a strategy to include ‘podiums’ with heights like nearby historic structures that emphasize the architecture of the historic districts’ era of significance.
- The district needs greater density of housing, including workforce and market rate to balance the current mix of housing and the density of social services in the area. The lack of a mix of housing impacts ground floor businesses as well as cultural and educational institutions in the neighborhood. This has also discouraged the redevelopment of vacant and surface parking lots.
- Lan Su Classical Chinese Garden conducted an in-house study by a horticulturist and found that the Garden will receive adequate sunlight from the south side from 10 am to 2 pm for most of the year. This is due to the height reduction from 250 ft. to 100 ft. on the block south of the Garden, as proposed by the Central City 2035 plan. Further, the study found that the shadow from a 200-ft. building on the west side would have little or no effect on the plants in the Garden.
- Lan Su – also supports greater density in the New Chinatown/Japantown Historic District as integral to promoting the long-term reinvigoration of this important historic district.
- The redevelopment of vacant lots will help to restore gaps in the street wall and bring more activity to the district which is important for the preservation of the historic resources that remain in the district. The district will also benefit from new ground floor uses and activation.
- The contributing historic buildings give the district its unique character —and they must be honored. The District’s nomination documents identified it as a collection of individual historic buildings, rather than a cohesive assembly needing patching up with structures that are the same shape to make it complete. The District is essentially a museum of individual structures each with their story to tell. Law requires that they be preserved. What is important and required by District Design Guidelines is respect and compatibility.
- The maximum height limits proposed for Block 33 will allow greater housing densities to be achieved adjacent to a Max line stop (an estimated increase from 296 to 592 units) with the number of affordable units increasing from 32 to 64 units.



**Re-adopt CC2035 Plan to prevent development delays and additional economic hardships.** Following the adoption of the CC2035 Plan in 2018, numerous projects were set in motion that used zoning provisions and standards not allowed by the old code that is now in effect due to the remand.

- New office, retail, and housing projects need the certainty of a readopted and effective CC2035, especially now, with so many other uncertainties brought about by COVID-19 that are beyond our local control.
- The CC2035 appeal process has had the unintended consequence stalling and stopping projects including senior housing, affordable housing and supportive housing - all of which are sorely needed within the Central City. It also has served to confuse land use policy with design-related discretionary review of related items such as scale, form and character appropriateness.

**Retain and re-adopt the ecoroof development standards of the CC2035 Plan.** Over 67 written pieces of testimony and numerous oral testimonies supported the re-adoption of the plan maintaining the ecoroof standard in its current form. Only a single testifier requested that the ecoroof provision be modified or removed and instead allow the harvesting of rainwater.

## **II. Testimony Against Re-adoption of the Plan**

**Reduce Maximum heights in the New Chinatown/Japantown Historic District.** A number of individuals as well as representatives from Restore Oregon, the Architectural Heritage Center and the Japanese American Museum noted they were concerned that the maximum heights proposed for the historic district were too high and out of scale with the existing character of the district. Some noted concern that such heights would impact the district such that the important Chinese, Japanese, and African American cultural heritage would be lost. Two members of Historic Landmarks Commission spoke about the lack of compatibility of taller buildings in relationship to district's historic buildings.

- The heights will result in development that impacts the Chinese, Japanese, and African American cultural heritage of the district —swallowed up by out of scale development. Compatible development within historic districts is critical if these districts are to fulfill their role as lively, active parts of the city that transmit important cultural stories.
- New construction at these heights could easily overwhelm the district. To avoid this, the Landmarks Commission needs to be able to protect the district's character. It needs the authority to deny proposed tall buildings found to create incompatibility and to require design modifications so that the new construction maintains the street character of the district but does not loom over the existing historic buildings.
- The City must codify clearly that zoned heights in historic districts are permissive, not an entitlement. They are a maximum, not a guarantee.



- Codify that the Landmarks Commission has authority to adjust heights and setbacks to ensure compatibility with historic context. Don't throw them under the bus by putting Landmarks in an impossible position – and don't set up yourselves for contentious appeals of Landmarks decisions.

**Long-term Approaches to urban design and density are needed as a result of COVID-19.** A few individuals expressed a belief that COVID-19 and the potential for future pandemics will result in new approaches to urban planning that result in less dense development in the urban core, more suburban and rural development, and a less reliance on zoning that allows tall buildings that use high floor area ratios.

**Delay the Re-adoption of the CC2035.** Numerous people suggested that the current City Council should delay a final vote on the re-adoption of the plan until after Commissioner Fish's seat has been refilled, and after the November general election.

**Modify FAR transfer sectors to align with individual neighborhood boundaries.** A few pieces of testimony, including from the Pearl neighborhood association, requested a code change to require the provision for unlimited Floor Area Ratio (FAR) transfer be within the neighborhood of its deployment rather than by floor area transfer sectors. Comments received state that the transfer sector areas are too large, and the goal should be to preserve older buildings and increase the density of the new ones in the same neighborhood.

### **III. Non-Zoning Code related testimony related to New Chinatown/Japantown Historic District**

There was agreement by individuals and organizations, both for and against the CC2035 Plan, that the New Chinatown/Japantown Historic District is a very important historic place that desperately needs investment, redevelopment of its many surface parking lots, and some deep cleaning. The testifiers have described different approaches to get there through the zoning code and map as described above. Beyond the scope CC2035, there are a few common themes raised noted below:

- Take a stand against demolition-by-neglect. Pass an anti-blight ordinance with meaningful penalties. There should be no reward for letting a historic building fall into such disrepair that owners claim the building is too far gone. The Old Blanchet House and the Wong Laundry Building are two examples.
- Invest in restoration and resilience. Long-promised urban renewal funds should be funneled into seismic retrofitting and restoration of the existing historic buildings and legacy businesses, not just into new construction.

