

Let's Talk: Oakland Plan Update June 21, 2023

Attendees: Andrea Boykowycz, Christian Umbach, Sam Gallagher, Dominic Victoria, Katie Emmert, David Manthei, Brandon Gipko, Gabby DeMarchi, Justin Dandoy, Ken Doyno

Andrea Boykowycz introduced herself and Christian Umbach, Senior Planner with the Department of City Planning.

Christian began his presentation updating the community on Oakland Plan implementation.

The Oakland Plan consists of dozens of goals and policies and over 100 projects and programs, making up a “to-do list” of action items. Christian emphasized that the community hubs project specifically will be discussed, expressing a need for input.

The Oakland Plan process began in Fall 2019, using City Planning’s five-stage [neighborhood planning framework](#). The Oakland Plan is in the fifth stage, *realize*, which involves implementation of the plan’s action items. Christian directed those interested in more details on how the community was engaged to the [Engagement Summary Report](#) for the project. The Engage PGH website allows the public to comment directly on projects, including the Oakland Plan. All pages are archived and available online.

In winter 2020, the Oakland Plan steering committee developed an equity strategy to promote engagement of underrepresented and marginalized groups. The identified groups include African-American residents, university students, and immigrants/newcomers. The Oakland Plan also incorporated and influenced related strategic and institutional master plans.

Christian defined the vision, goals, policies, and programs/projects of the Oakland Plan. The plan is divided into four chapters: community, development, mobility, and infrastructure.

Christian demonstrated how to access the Oakland Plan online. Searching for “the Oakland Plan Pittsburgh, PA” will bring up the Engage page for the project ([here](#)). City Planning is also working on a printable PDF version of the plan. Each project’s status, projected start, leads/partners, and potential funding sources are listed. Projects with blue hyperlinks have more details available. Christian emphasized that because the Oakland Plan is a community plan, each project requires several partners, and that often project details can vary.

Christian displayed the Oakland Plan Implementation page, which can be found on the right side of the Engage site under “Pages” ([here](#)). It will be actively updated to track each of the 116 projects and programs, noting the status as complete, partial completion, ongoing, in progress, on deck, or not started. A progress bar at the top shows that almost one-fourth of projects have a status other than not started within the first year. City Planning hopes this feature increases transparency on plan implementation.

Q&A:

Q: Could you talk a bit about the Status Tracker/Implementation site? Is it live? What does it mean that a project is “complete”?

A: The Status Tracker is live on the Implementation page and acts as City Planning’s understanding of the status of each project. City Planning asks partners to share input to help track, but the page is active and evolving, so input is welcomed. Most of the completed items involve zoning, which began concurrently with the Oakland Plan implementation.

Q: An Engage tutorial was suggested during the planning process. Does such a training exist?

A: I will look into it.

Q: How was the steering committee formed? Who was a part of it and who was not?

A: The steering committee was a roughly 30-member body representing major stakeholders in Oakland. While it convened before my time with City Planning, the [Engagement Summary Report](#) can be found in the Appendix section of the Engage page. The report includes a list of representatives on the committee.

Q: Why are community members not seeing anything written about the Walnut Capital agreement with the Mayor’s Office?

A: I’m not aware of such an agreement, but I can circle back internally.

Andrea clarified: the mediated solution expanded the UC-MU district to include Halket between Forbes and the Boulevard before the UC-MU existed, and before the zoning package as a whole was passed. Prior to the adoption of the plan, her understanding is that the Halket portion is now included proper in the base zone UC-MU, and there is no difference in governance. The Gainey administration intended to ensure there was similarity between the governance of projects happening in that corridor before the zoning was adopted by approximating parameters in the UC-MU. Parcel A, the project of concern, is currently on hold per Walnut Capital’s press account and the University of Pittsburgh has not made a formal announcement on how that project will proceed.

Christian transitions to second presentation to answer a follow up on incentives. Planning began with a [land use strategy](#), which provides general language about the attributes of the community and sets goals for how City Planning envisions development, including use, scale, and open space-to-building ratio. The land use strategy informs zoning, the legal regulations that prescribe to a developer what and how they can develop.

Several new zoning amendments were adopted with the Oakland Plan:

1. Fifth and Forbes Avenue corridor: Urban Center—Employment (UC-E) district focuses on employment and institutional use above housing.

2. Boulevard of the Allies corridor: Urban Center—Mixed Use (UC-MU) district focuses on denser mixed-use development, which could include desired community services or housing that could be affordable.
3. Central Oakland Residential: Residential—Mixed Use (R-MU) district allows for new multi-unit housing meant to better meet student and affordable housing needs, citing substandard housing produced by landlords lacking an incentive to improve housing.
4. Inclusionary housing: Inclusionary Zoning Overlay District (IZOD) requires that development projects providing 20+ units must price 10% of those units affordably.

Commenter pointed out and expressed discontent with a zoning boundary change of Oakcliffe.

Christian continued, explaining that there is a give-and-take of what the community benefits from the development and what the developer can get. Provisions exist that require step backs and green buffers.

New zoning codes implement form-based code: beyond usage, how does the space look? Form-based code allows for the form of development to be much higher quality than traditional base zoning: landscaping, public access, building length, ground floor transparency.

Performance points zoning allows development projects to increase height by 15 feet per point by incorporating community priorities such as affordable housing, public art, and energy-efficient design. This only applies to UC-E and UC-MU zoning districts.

Q: Have the amendments and map changes all been adopted?

A: Yes, all the amendments and the zoning map have been adopted. The official [zoning map](#) has been updated to reflect these changes. Additional opportunities for re-zoning North Oakland are also a possibility, but that process has not begun.

Christian transitioned to the final stage of the presentation, announcing that planning discussions for the community service hubs project have begun. The project responds to needs such as community centers, daycares, careers services, educational programming, and free wi-fi by proposing a single location with each.

City Planning has identified six potential locations, listed from most practical to most conceptual: Frazier/Park Fieldhouse, Herron Hill Pumping Station, OPDC Building, The Corner, Community Human Services Building, and Zulema Park Area.

Andrea clarified that the intent is to produce multiple community service hubs, responding to unique demographics and needs of Oakland's four neighborhoods. OPDC would like to kickstart a community feedback campaign to determine types of programming and investments that would be needed in each hub. Feedback will begin with the potential locations in South and North Oakland. City Planning has asked that OPDC submit a budget request in the coming fiscal year to kickstart the process.

Q&A:

Q: Audience members are seeing a “pending approval” notice on Christian’s page. Is the page being shared different than the one that is currently published?

A: The only difference on the page was the status of the community service hub project, which will be updated to “on deck” after the meeting. It will be used as a place to share feedback.

Q: What are the potential funding sources for the community service hubs?

A: Citing the project’s Engage page, funding begins with the City (Trust Fund/Capital Budget), but will likely be a collaborative effort, including institutions and grants.

Q: How can we accommodate neighbors without internet skills and/or access?

A: Andrea – OPDC would like to include a series of in-person events at each location being considered for rehabilitation for the engagement plan.

DaVonn Brown, Community Engagement Coordinator for Councilperson Strassburger, announced that their office will be submitting a budget request to OMB next week for the second location, the Herron Hill Pumping Station. Letters of support can be sent to their office.

Q: What does the process look like for meeting a community priority and therefore receiving a performance point?

A: The process is somewhat technical and spelled out in zoning code. For those that involve investing in a fund, the developer has an up-front payment and then a timeline to submit the rest. Other points go through a staff review process with several checkpoints, and the developer does not receive permits until approved.

Q: Do each of the districts have the same process?

A: It’s flexible. Certain points are only applicable in certain districts. More information can be found at the City Planning [Performance Points Process Guide](#) webpage. The zoning code is always the most up-to-date resource. Funds go into a City Trust Fund that is being established by City Planning. Funds will be distributed through grants to support job access, workforce development, and entrepreneurial support services. Funds collected in Oakland development will be prioritized to impact Oakland projects.

Q: Do you have a sense of the utilization of the points system elsewhere? In the commenter’s experience, they haven’t seen any developer utilize it, given financial assessment.

A: Only anecdotal evidence. City Planning could explore a report created with zoning. There is a strong want for this program to be successful and will personally look into evidence of use.

Q: How do developers choose which of the community priorities to meet for a project?

A: Can’t speak for developers but would assume the decision is based largely on what is feasible given their development situation. All options are determined to benefit the community in some capacity.

Q: Is there any insight into the RCO code processes?

A: There has been a report of public comments on the program and City Planning is coordinating with City Council to determine if and how the program continues.

A commenter noted that none of the community priorities are requirements, suggesting that some of the higher-priority items will never be utilized (i.e., public art instead of affordable housing). Added that the energy point is easy for developers to meet.

Lindsey Aquino-Robles, Community Liaison for the Mayor's Office

First City in the Streets event happened in the North Side in May, and the next one is on June 28th, at Penn Avenue in Garfield. City departments will be out to answer any questions from community members. Free food and live music.

City Parks summer guide is out and has special events, including movies in city parks. Pools have been opened after success finding lifeguards to apply. Farmers markets are taking place weekly until mid-to-late November in Squirrel Hill (Sundays from 9am-1pm), East End (Mondays 3-7pm), Carrick (Wednesdays 3-7pm) and the North Side (Fridays 3-7pm).

Mayor's Office is hiring a press officer. Deadline is June 26th.

Justin Dandoy, University of Pittsburgh Office of Engagement and Community Affairs

Pitt's Spring 2023 News From Your Neighbor newsletter is available (online access [here](#)).