

Oakland-Wide Community Meeting, January 25, 2022
Oakland Public Realm District E (OPR-E)

Proposed Oakland Public Realm District E (OPR-E)

Wanda Wilson, executive director of OPDC, introduced the meeting agenda and welcomed Mayor Ed Gainey.

Mayor Gainey introduced himself and his staff. He thanked constituents for coming to the meeting and emphasized his primary goal: listening, learning, and understanding how people feel about the provisional legislation.

Before opening up the floor for public comment, Wilson summarized OPDC's concerns with OPR-E, bucketing them into five major categories: the bill's process, uses, purpose, zoning boundaries, and that the bill is not necessary to achieve desired development aims. Wilson articulated that though OPDC is opposed to the current proposed zoning legislation, that doesn't mean OPDC isn't interested in redevelopment. OPDC understands the need for additional housing developments and things like a grocery store in the neighborhood.

Comments and questions:

Randy Sargent, President of the South Oakland Neighborhood Group, spoke about the bill's lack of affordability and threat of displacement for long-term Oakland residents. He said that five loopholes exist within the "affordability" aspect of the provisional legislation: it doesn't include any income limit to target groups who need affordable housing; there's no legal mechanism to maintain affordability over time; it only restricts rental properties and does not, for example, condominiums; there is no requirement that states demolished housing turn back into housing; and the "affordable" units are only available to a particular population of employees at Pitt.

Another Oakland resident, who disclosed that they were disabled, had reservations about the accessibility within the proposed legislation. The bill's purpose didn't include any commitment to accessibility, which lacks equity. He emphasized the need to go beyond ADA accessibility and that the provisional bill doesn't currently do that.

Elana Zaitsoff, President of the Oakcliffe Community Organization, supported the affordability loophole argument. She also raised concern about the bill displacing students on Halket and McKee. In addition, she described the poorly written boundaries of both proposed Subdistrict B and Subdistrict C, stating that there's too much room for interpretation as to whether or not certain areas are included. She also described concerns about Zulema Parklet within the legislation, articulating that Zulema needed to be preserved. Lastly, she explained that OCO, a South Oakland community organization, has taken a formal stance in opposition to OPR-E and requested that the Mayor's Office schedule a time to sit down with the residents of Oakcliffe. She also asked the Mayor's Office to send information to him that's larger than what the Engage PGH site allows, such as pictures, charts, and attachments.

Wilson added to the Zuluma Parklet concerns, stating that the Oakland Plan recommends Zulema properly be zoned P for Park.

A Louisa Street resident articulated concerns about the proposed height allowances and uses. She stated that the legislation needed to accommodate long-term resident desires and properly refine its uses.

A non-permanent resident of South Oakland discussed qualms about the displacement of residents and the lack of affordability within the legislation. She explained from a student perspective that a major fault of this bill is that the housing described is not properly targeting anyone. She posed the question: If the developed housing is not for students and long-term residents, who are the intended audience?

An Oakland resident disclosed he owned some property on Haket Street. He was excited to sell his property to Walnut Capital. He described Oakland as not a welcoming residential area and discussed his approval of Walnut Capital's proposed re-development plans. He emphasized the need for a grocery store in Oakland, and the developer's profitable ways allow Oakland to be a more sought-after neighborhood.

Wilson clarified that tonight's discussion focused on the zoning, not any conceptual development project. She stated that OPDC is not anti-development, but has concerns about detrimental impacts to surrounding property and impact on the community's character.

The next speaker was a current student at Pitt interested in becoming a long-term resident. He discussed his family history in Oakland and stated that he thinks maintaining the neighborhood fabric is crucial. He described his approval for the proposed legislation, stating that it could bring great things to Oakland, including the grocery store. He stated support for more residents in Oakland.

A resident of Lawn Street was worried about the lack of proper public engagement regarding OPR-E. When she attended Walnut Capital sponsored meetings, she felt censored discussing her points of view and was afraid that her words would be taken out of context and twisted. She also echoed that OPR-E sets a dangerous precedent, negating neighborhood protections like residential compatibility standards, and that it adversely impacts senior housing.

Lezetta Cox, the executive director of People's Oakland, discussed concerns about the lack of affordable housing, green space leniency, and the process of the bill. She stated that People's Oakland, as an entity, is formally against the proposed zoning legislation.

The next speaker shared concerns that Walnut Capital sidestepped zoning and planning to build whatever they wanted. She also was fearful that the plan falsely claimed to add green space without any plans of formal developments to follow through.

An Oakland neighbor who resides in Four Mile Run articulated the dangerous precedent that this would set for other neighborhoods and neighborhood planning processes.

A resident of Dithridge objected to the process, emphasizing that the top-down approach to community development woefully neglects resident concerns and should instead prioritize community-driven strategies. She also argued that a comprehensive zoning plan shouldn't ignore residential compatibility standards.

An Oakland resident stated the plan was not progressive or community-focused. She articulated that she understands that development needs to happen, but not like this.

A resident of South Oakland said OPR-E is an evolving and progressive bill and would help make Oakland stronger.

Another resident shared that if Oakland Crossings can move forward, neighbors should deserve to get something out of it because Oakland is losing the fabric of this community.

A South Oakland resident listed his qualms of legislation: the lack of affordable housing is bad, the process is bad, and the bonuses are far too generous.

A Frazier Street resident articulated her reservations about the process and added that traffic studies weren't considered in the bill at all.

An Oakland resident argued that resident issues aren't being heard correctly in the proposed legislation.

A South Oakland resident emphasized that OPR-E effectively renders the community engagement process useless. He asked meeting attendees in favor of "growth in Oakland," posing, "How can we grow without affordability? How can we grow if we're displacing people?" He was fearful that many people were buying into the promises from Walnut Capital without holding them accountable along the way.

Mayor Gainey had the final word of the meeting. He thanked attendees for giving him the input he needed to hear and stated that he wanted to take time and understand all of the proposed legislation before drawing any conclusions on it. He invited attendees to the City-hosted community meeting on OPR-E planned for Wednesday, February 2 at 6:00 p.m.