



## Cultural Overlay District Advisory Committee

MEETING SUMMARY, March 13, 2009

**Committee members present:** Randy Engstrom, Jerry Everard, Pat Graney, Fen Hsiao, Doug Ito, Hallie Kuperman, Matthew Kwatinetz, Fidelma McGinn, Richard Muhlebach, Jim Reinhardtsen, Michael Seiwerath, Robert Sondheim, Paige Weinheimer

**City of Seattle attendees:** Chris Godwin (City Council central staff), Rebecca Herzfeld (City Council central staff)

**Guest:** Seattle City Council member Nick Licata

**Consultant staff:** Kjristine Lund, Dennis Sellin

### 1. Presentation by Seattle City Council member Nick Licata

The meeting began at 11:00 am.

Seattle City Council member Nick Licata opened the meeting by thanking the committee members for their work to date, and reminding them of the Council's expectations for a package of recommendations from the committee.

The CODAC was created to address a specific and unique problem: the disappearance of space for arts and culture from Seattle's neighborhoods, highlighted by specific events on Capitol Hill. CODAC has been tasked with formulating recommendations to address this specific issue, using Capitol Hill as a pilot or template, but framing recommendations so that they could be applied to neighborhoods throughout the city.

The recommendations must define what makes this committee, and this problem, unique, and why it needs the attention of the Council. Recommendations must therefore be formed and presented in a manner that is clear to the Council, to the Mayor, and to a layperson. The Council can support you if your recommendations are both clear and realistic.

However, the recommendations must take into account the current economic situation and trends, possible reductions in City revenues, and the possible loss of affordable housing.

A Council staff member identified several areas in which CODAC could look to City programs for support or assistance:

- Council has set aside some staff funding for the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) to continue to work on this issue from the land use and zoning side
- Raise support for arts and culture as part of Council's economic recovery initiative, emphasizing its economic value and job creation aspects.
- Provide staff in Office of Economic Development (OED) to promote cultural overlay districts and arts-led economic development (cite comprehensive plan

policies from the economic development element of the plan). OED could lead coordination efforts within City government.

- Include arts and culture as priorities in neighborhood plan updates.

Question: Council's position on the Prosperity Partnership cultural access fund (CAF) proposal currently in the state legislature?

Councilmember Licata Response: Legislation did not get out of committee in this session, but it is not entirely dead. It is clear that the legislature will go to the public with a tax package. The problem with the CAF is that it does not identify a revenue source. If you support it, you should contact (state representative) Frank Chopp. Supporters of this legislation need to be patient and may have to wait until the economic and political climate are right, which may be several years away.

Prior to his departure, Council member Licata was thanked for his exceptional leadership on this issue.

## 2. Report back on February 27 meetings, review minutes

The two subcommittees reported back on their previous meetings (both held on February 27). Summaries of both subcommittee meetings are available on the CODAC website:

[CODAC meeting summaries](#)

The incentives committee process was discussed:

One of the key questions that arose in the several meetings held with members of the incentives subcommittee was, "What is it that you are attempting to provide incentives for?" A most general response is that CODAC is looking to address the need for affordable space for arts and culture. In this context, we recognize that there are dynamics beyond art that promote the overall ecology of a cultural neighborhood.

We provided this information to a real estate economist working with the City of Seattle, along with some proposed scenarios at specific locations within the proposed district on Capitol Hill, including a price per square foot that we estimated arts organization could afford to pay.

Some of the incentives under consideration (such as up-zoning) have already been put in place in the various existing overlay districts in the Capitol Hill area.

We got creative, and looked at creating a "ghost incentive" on 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue, where the additional height allowed could be transferred to areas of Broadway not already up-zoned.

We also looked at some regulatory relief, such as relaxed parking restrictions (largely in place already in many parts of the proposed district) or relaxed energy code requirements.

We realize that there are incentives already on the books that either are not being implemented, or have already been taken advantage of.

Comment: Parameters create advantages, so we should not consider ourselves disadvantaged in any way.

## 3. Discussion of draft recommendation concepts and actions

Comment: We have already established that CODAC is not here to recreate the old Odd Fellows Hall. We recognize that each neighborhood has a unique cultural identity; therefore, we cannot make "top-down" recommendations.

Several of us have developed a proposal from which CODAC could frame its recommendations. One idea would be to have a “district development manager” for cultural districts. He/she would mediate with neighborhoods, talk to neighborhood councils, and build strategy around neighborhood cultural identity. By being hosted within the City of Seattle’s Office of Economic Development, he/she could work closely with other City departments, and also with 4Culture, whose real estate division is working on an accessible online inventory of arts and cultural space.

Comment: The comprehensive plan for Seattle contains all of the elements that CODAC is seeking, and would be an appropriate place to house some of CODAC’s principal values; the neighborhood plans could be the venue for implementation of recommendations on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis. We are talking about culture-controlled economic development.

(The draft proposal was circulated among committee members, and a copy is attached to this document).

Comment: We must be sure that there is advocacy and support for these ideas, and that those who would benefit from our recommendations (such as artists) will take advantage of them.

Comment: This proposal contains too much process, and layers of uncertainty. The commission approach adds a possible element of subjectivity to the process as well. I would suggest balancing the desired outcome of access and empowerment with greater clarity in the proposal. Keep it simple—need an identifiable mission and vision, and to create an effective story.

Comment: While we agree that an oversight process for district designation is commendable, it must be democratic. The commission approach seems to be more top-down than democratic.

Comment: You may want to look at the approach taken by the Seattle Chinatown/International District Public Development Authority. They are creating a resource center, a means to access tools, similar to CODAC. They have an advisory board instead of a commission.

Question: regarding tax credits or exemptions, I would like to know what those taxes are now funding.

Response: Those fees are now going into the City’s general fund, and not to specific programs. A proposal for tax credits or exemptions is likely to be more favorably looked upon than a new budget line item.

Response: Concurring with the notion of getting a new appropriation from the general fund.

Question: what about up-zoning around the new rail stations?

Response: Station area overlay zones exist, with properties in those districts already up-zoned from other surrounding zones. One notion could be the expansion of those overlay zones to encompass a larger geographic area. This could be done as a recommendation in neighborhood plan updates.

Comment: When a developer gets an incentive, it is usually based on affordability calculations. For the arts, what are the criteria to make that determination? It is confusing to the developer, and adds uncertainty, which developers do not like.

Comment: The notion of an in-house district manager is exciting. Such an advocate would be great. The incentives discussed are worthy, but an exemption for existing organizations would also be beneficial. Goal is to empower people to use the tools, and have developers be receptive to artists.

Comment: We have used the terms “art” and “culture” for many months now, and we have not explained the difference between them.

Comment: What a great opportunity: arts and culture as the economic driver for our city of neighborhoods. We only need to create the capacity, and animate the processes that currently exist. Our short answer is that communities themselves would define and identify their own culture. There is room, but there is not yet a process for it.

We are also aware that outreach is a huge piece of this entire proposal, and we need to move on it.

Comment: We should start by demonstrating to developers that culture is our economic driver. Then start thinking about our brand, our website. This is something artists could understand and get behind.

Comment: we need to make clear the economic impact, the value of the arts, and show how arts and culture benefit the city as a whole, and its individual neighborhoods.

Our report should state how our recommendations align with Council priorities, and other City goals.

The report should also state that this is intended as a citywide list of recommendation, but that Capitol Hill should go through the process first.

Comment: We intend to use the stated categories as the general outline of a recommendations report. There has been a suggestion to do the final recommendations as a web page, which could be more dynamic than a paper report. However, we recognize that the City will require a paper report from us as well. We may also compile an executive summary as a handout. However, these extras are not funded.

The next CODAC meeting will be held at 11:00 am on March 27 at the Capitol Hill library.