

Summary Discussion of Proposed Neighborhood Business District Strategy (NBDS) And How It Relates to the Morgan Junction Neighborhood Plan

This document accompanies the *Neighborhood Business District Strategy Key Recommendations: Impact to the Morgan Junction Neighborhood Plan Goals and Policies May 2005*. While that document provides a recommendation-by-recommendation analysis of consistency with the Morgan Junction Neighborhood Plan (MJNP), this document addresses overall issues and concerns with the proposed legislation.

Introduction and Summary Recommendations

A small group of Morgan residents have reviewed the NBDS documentation and proposed code changes. This document reflects only their opinions and, while it is being circulated to people on the Morgan Junction email distribution list, there has not been sufficient time to present this information, have a community discussion, and achieve a consensus position. The first quarter 2005 Morgan Community Association (MoCA) meeting took place on April 21, only 2 weeks after the final draft of the proposed NBDS code changes was released. There was insufficient time for in-depth analysis, and the next MoCA meeting is not scheduled until June 14. Based on the significant changes to the Land Use Code, we respectfully request that one of two actions be taken by the City Council:

- 1) Delay action on this legislation until community groups can present these final recommendations to their communities and collect feedback. A second Public Hearing should be scheduled to receive those comments.
- 2) If the Council moves forward on adopting the NBDS as proposed, do not allow the code changes to take effect in the areas covered by the Morgan Junction Neighborhood Plan, and direct City staff to lead a update review of the MJNP, establishing a schedule, staff support and funding for such activity.

Review of Specific Concerns

Breadth of Code Changes

At the broadest level, the proposed changes of the NBDS are not consistent with the MJNP for several reasons. The MJNP has a specific recommendation that no changes be made to zoning district boundaries, development standards, and/or permitted uses for any zone within the Morgan Junction urban village and planning area. This was intended to give the Morgan Junction community some influence over changes which would affect the intent and purpose of the MJNP.

Many of the proposed NBDS changes are related to those three topics. This is not to say that all the proposed changes would not be beneficial for the Morgan Junction neighborhood, but rather that the community should have the opportunity to provide input on specific NBDS policies that may conflict with the goals, policies and recommendations of the Neighborhood Plan.

Some examples include the removal of view protection, the inclusion of a new review process by DPD for small projects that does not appear to include public involvement, and that the *Director's Report on Land Use Code Changes* says that "a number of improvements to Design Guidelines are suggested" (p.46). We have not found a description of these improvements in the proposed code changes and are concerned about the extent and impact of these changes.

Single-Purpose Residential

The changes related to Single-Purpose Residential (SPR) appear to be inconsistent with the intent of the MJNP related to the vitality of the business district. In 1997, MoCA did an independent survey of the business districts within our Planning Area and found a vacancy rate of 5.3%. In May 2005, another survey was conducted in roughly the same area and the vacancy rate was 7.6%. According to the Director's Report, a healthy business district has a vacancy rate of 3% – 7%, so there is no reason to believe that urgent action is needed in the Morgan Junction area. There are several alternatives that should be considered for Morgan Junction.

The alternative to allowing SPR is for the Morgan Junction business district to take on a Pedestrian designation. A Pedestrian designation was not even a discussion point during creation of the MJNP and the limitations of a Pedestrian designation would also appear to be inconsistent with all the MJNP goals and policies related to the provision of sufficient parking. Accordingly, this issue will not be simple for the Morgan Junction area.

In addition, the decision by the Seattle Monorail Project to locate their southern terminus station in the center of the Morgan Junction business district will certainly open up discussion about the applicability of a Station Area Overlay zone. It seems that the community and city should have a comprehensive discussion about what appear to be four options:

1. Tailor code changes to be consistent with the Morgan Junction Neighborhood Plan
2. Accept SPR,
3. Accept a Pedestrian Designation in the form of a formal update to the MJNP, and
4. Accept a Station Area Overlay in the form of a formal update to the MJNP.

FAR Changes and Density

When the MJNP was created in 1997-99 and approved by the City Council in 1999, it was written with a target growth of 300 households. Under current zoning and uses, that is about the maximum development which could occur, and it is unclear what the maximum development would be under the new residential FAR-based allowance. If developers choose to build a lot of small units, the number of households moving into the Morgan Junction neighborhood could significantly exceed the growth target.

Additionally, in the 2004 update of the Seattle Comprehensive Plan, the Morgan Junction growth target was reduced to 200 households. So it begs the question of why a neighborhood should accept zoning changes which increase housing capacity beyond what is now considered an aggressive target for the neighborhood (300 households).

The concern is that all the MJNP recommended actions, as stated in the *MJNP Approval and Adoption Matrix*, may no longer be in sync to support growth beyond the previously-expected 300 households.

Open Space/Residential Amenities

The MJNP clearly supports acquiring public open space in both the business district and surrounding neighborhoods. While the proposed NBDS reduces the overall space required for residential amenities, it does provide an allowance that might help acquire additional open space for residents living in the NC zones. However, the proposed code is not explicit regarding several key areas, most notably the following:

- 1) The Director of DPD will be the sole arbiter of whether the off-site amenity area purchased or improved is “located within sufficient proximity to benefit the residents of the project to be served by the amenity.” What is “sufficient” proximity? Within 15 minutes by bus? Within 5 minutes of walking? Within ¼ mile? We would like specific clarification to ensure that this requirement truly serves residents in the same manner as if the amenity had been provide on-site.
- 2) The improvement or land acquisition is supposed to occur within an appropriate time. What defines “appropriate?” How will this time-frame be defined? Will it be the time elapsed from the start of project? Or will it be an expectation that the time should be measured by completion of providing the off-site amenity? It would be a shame if residents of a building have to wait five years for the cycle of acquisition and development of their open space in order to enjoy it.
- 3) We have concerns about the maintenance of this new off-site open space. Currently, it would be expected that the developer of a property provide the maintenance of required on-site outdoor open space. Allowing funding for “purchase or improvement” does not explicitly assure funding for maintenance of publicly-owned off-site open space. For example, if a pocket park was to be developed in the MJ business district, the responsibility for upkeep would transfer to the budget strapped Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation unless maintenance is specifically stipulated in the funding transfer. This issue does not appear to be addressed at all in the proposed code changes.

Parking

There is no doubt that parking is a concern in the Morgan Junction neighborhood. Parking surfaced again and again as a critical issue during preparation of the Morgan Junction Neighborhood Plan. It continues to be a critical issue today, especially with the advent of the proposed Monorail Station..

We acknowledge the difficulties inherent in making the transition from an auto-oriented to a transit-oriented city, but the plain fact is that Morgan Junction currently lacks excellent transit service (defined as headways of 15 minutes or less during the middle of the day on weekdays).

Obviously, if and when the Monorail station is constructed and the line opens, our level of transit service should improve. We cite the *Director's Report Land Use Code Changes* (page xiii) that the code changes are to "be responsive to local conditions - better reflect higher transit use and parking demand data". We completely agree that the City should be responsive to local conditions. Accordingly, we encourage that parking surveys be done of the Morgan Junction area--now and in the future--to provide a timely response to changes in our Urban Village. Until such time that decisions can be made on local conditions, we should not adopt changes that are based on rollups of city wide data.

In summary, we would like to reiterate the suggestions made at the beginning of this document:

1) Delay action on this legislation until community groups can present these final recommendations to their communities and collect feedback. A second Public Hearing should be scheduled to receive those comments.

Or

2) If Council moves forward on adopting the NBDS as proposed, do not allow the code changes to take effect in the areas contained within the Morgan Junction Neighborhood plan, and direct city staff to lead a update review of the MJNP, establishing a schedule, staff support and funding for such an activity.

Respectfully submitted

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