City of Fort Collins

Eastside and Westside Neighborhoods Character Study

Phase 1 Report:
Observations on Character and Context in the Neighborhoods

July 18, 2012
(updated with text corrections on August 20, 2012)

Introduction

The Eastside and Westside Neighborhood Character study seeks to evaluate neighborhood character and change in the core area neighborhoods near Downtown. The study was initiated primarily in response to resident concern about changes to the character of the neighborhoods related to demolition and new construction.

The information from the 2010 East and West Side Neighborhoods Design Standards Study provided part of the foundation for the current study. The Phase 1 work effort had two primary components:

- Background research and analysis by City staff and project consultants on existing development patterns and trends
- Community engagement

Phase 1 of the new study is now complete. It included an evaluation of the values, attitudes, concerns, and tolerance for change among citizens in the neighborhoods and others with an interest. This report summarizes Phase 1 results to support a discussion of potential future project phases.

Report Contents

Community Engagement

Phase 1 emphasized public engagement to provide a sense of citizen attitudes, opinions and concerns. Four primary methods were used:

- **Focus groups** organized by area of interest, with one for representatives of building, design and real estate industries and two for neighborhood residents

- **Community Workshops** with structured activities for participants to work in groups, as well as opportunities to record individual opinions. These were intended to collect more specific information about neighborhood character and issues.

- **Questionnaires** provided online with individual portals targeted for property owners, tenants and the general public

- **Web page** on the City's site with general project information, community outreach notices, sign-up for project notification and links to the general public questionnaire

Neighborhood Profile

Existing conditions in the Eastside and Westside neighborhoods include physical and qualitative features, regulatory characteristics and current development trends. These conditions help to shape development and may influence its perceived compatibility. Existing conditions also provide important background for further focused study of the neighborhood.

General Character

Community Identified Neighborhood Features

As part of the project's community engagement process, members of the community were asked to identify and describe a series of features which make the neighborhood unique and desirable to live in. Feedback from residents was largely consistent and included both physical and social characteristics. The most common traits participants described include friendly neighbors, diversity in people and buildings, and walkability. The following sections summarize the most commonly identified qualitative and physical neighborhood features of value to residents.

Valued qualitative aspects of neighborhood character include:

- Old charm and character of houses
- Friendly/neighborly sense of community
- Family/kid-friendly
- Modest homes
- Socioeconomic diversity
- Evident pride of ownership
- Diversity in ownership patterns
- One of a limited number of neighborhoods in town that does not have an HOA

Valued physical aspects of neighborhood character include:

- Walkability and bikability
- Proximity to amenities (including parks, schools, playgrounds, Old Town, trolley, CSU etc.)
- Historic character and homes
- Integrity within blocks
- Wide streets
- Detached sidewalks
- Variety in lot types
- Alleys
- Front porches
- Views through lots
- Not all fenced
- Trees
- Relative low density
- Diversity of house style, age and scale
- Uniqueness of character among Fort Collins neighborhoods
- Less car-oriented design
- Orientation towards neighbors
- Houses designed with sustainability aspects built into them already (prior to car and air conditioning design)

Development Patterns

A series of computer models illustrate some of the typical existing development patterns throughout the neighborhoods. These context models can be used to illustrate existing characteristics of the neighborhood, as well as to test infill models within each context to help understand the elements of new construction which contribute to neighborhood compatibility.

A total of four contexts were selected as representative of the range of conditions found across the neighborhoods. Two models were created for each the Eastside and Westside, however, conditions found in one area are often representative of those found in several others.

The contexts were selected based on the following factors:

- Lot size
- Lot configuration (orientation, frontage, shape, etc.)
- Street patterns
- Alley patterns
- Lot coverage
- FAR (Floor Area Ratio)
- Building age
- Building size
- Building height

Within the Eastside and Westside Neighborhoods a high level of diversity of lot and building sizes, shapes and patterns exists.

Context A

Context A is representative of conditions which occur in a series of blocks through-out much of the Westside neighborhood. The context is also representative of several blocks on the Eastside. This context contains a high level of variety in lot size, lot frontage, lot coverage, building height, building age and floor area ratios (FAR). Lots in the area are predominantly oriented east-west. The area has distinctive, tight H-shaped alleys and simple north-south alleys.
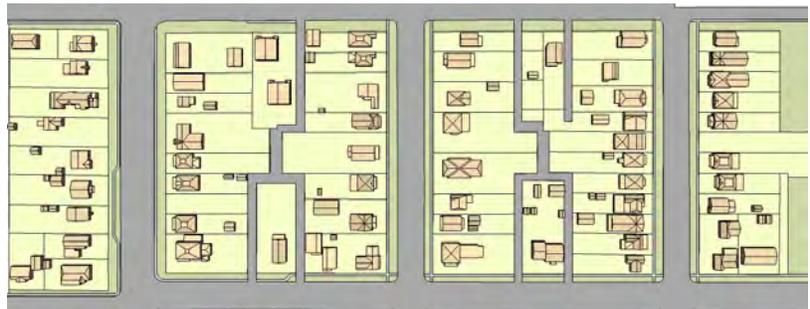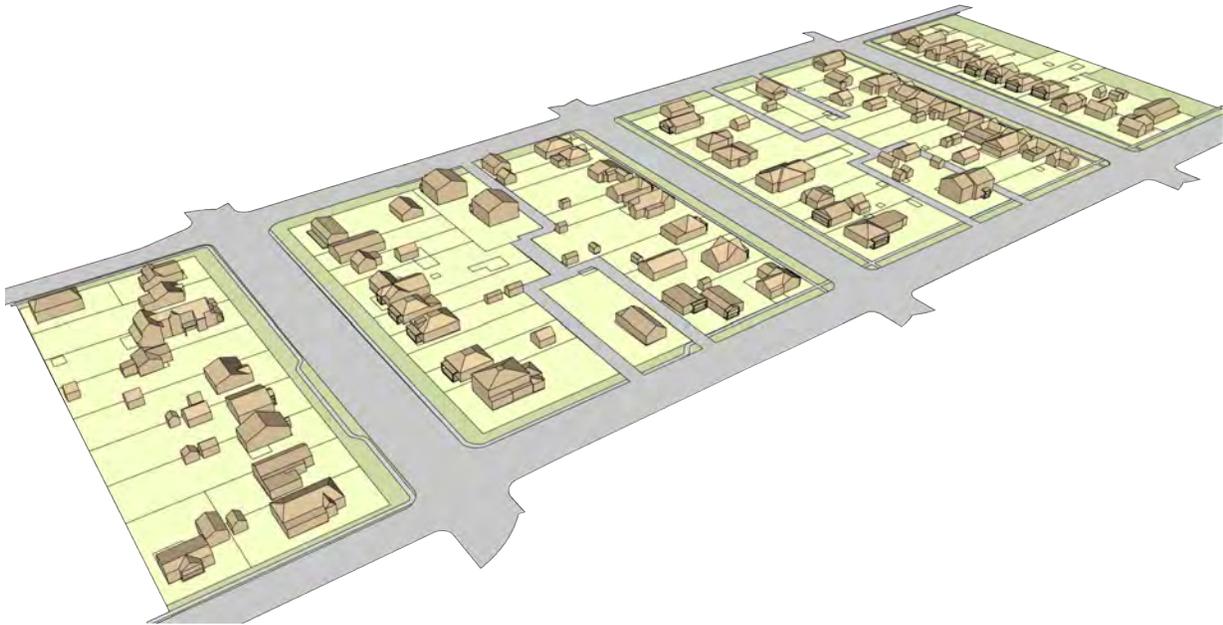
Context B

This area includes one section of Mountain Avenue and vicinity. In this context lots are typically larger, while at the same time they have narrower frontages. Here the typical house size is also higher than other areas, as is building height. A range of FARs is also present. The area selected is the most representative of the conditions found along Mountain Avenue, and includes all of the most common lot configurations along the street as well. The area has both simple east-west alleys as well as the distinctive, wide H-shaped alleys found in many areas of both neighborhoods. Lots in the area are oriented north-south, with east-west lots inside the H of the alleys.
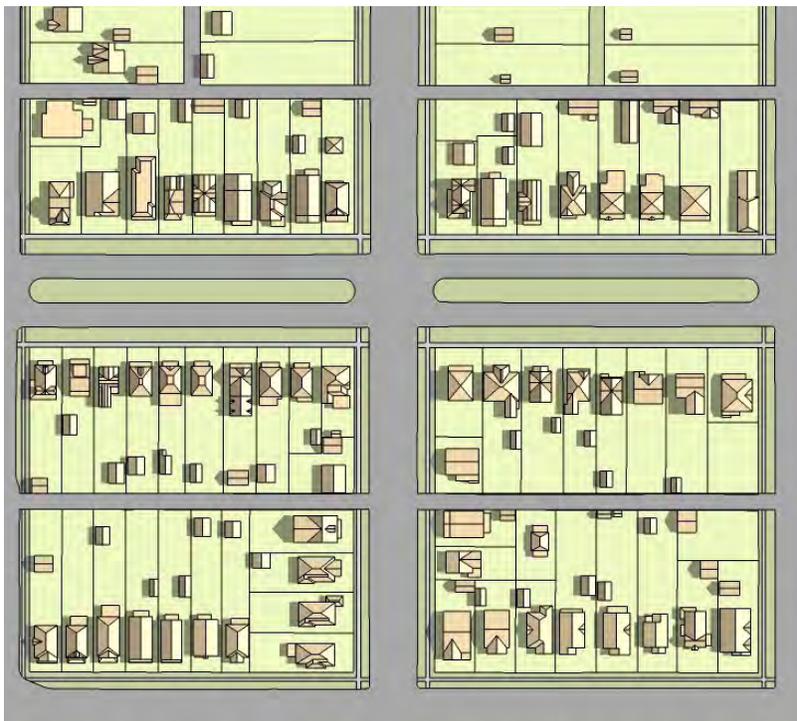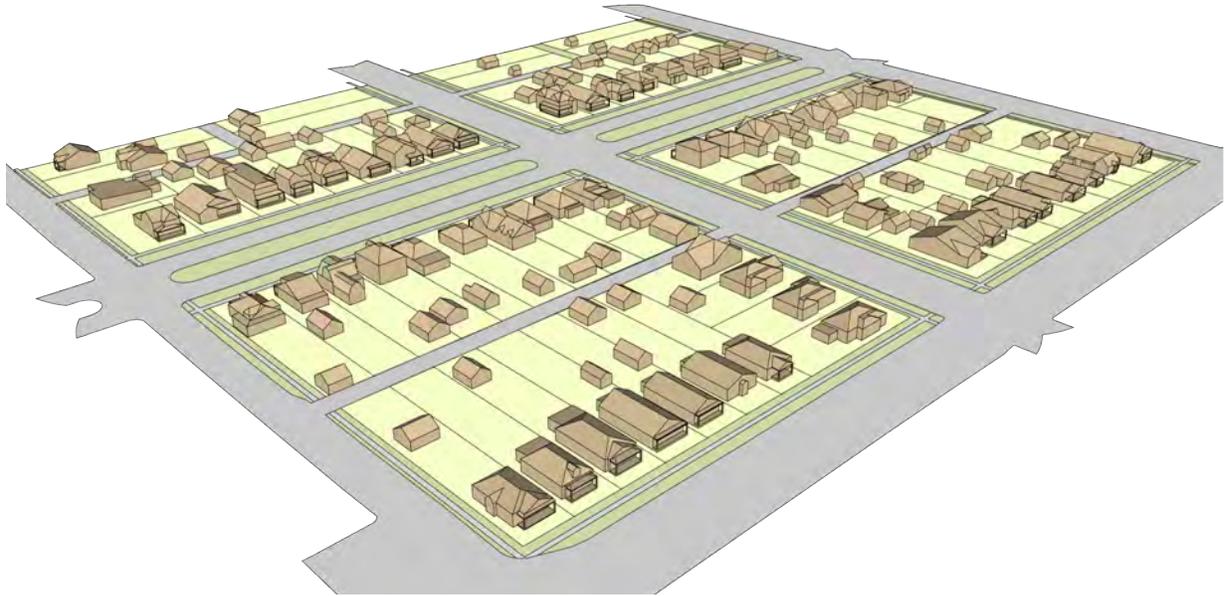
Context C

This area is representative of the majority of the Eastside neighborhood, covering most of the central and northern areas, as well as a few areas on the Westside. It represents the "average" Eastside conditions in terms of lot size, lot frontage, lot coverage, building height, FAR, building age and remodel date. Lots in the area are predominantly oriented east–west, with streets and alleys running north–south.
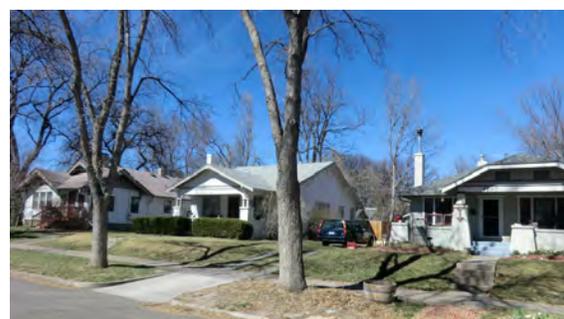
Context D

This area represents the 1940s and 1950s subdivisions found in several areas of both the Eastside and Westside neighborhoods. Wider lots are more typical here, and there is a high percentage of remodels. The area includes a full range of lot coverages and sizes, with houses predominately one story in height. Street patterns include cul-de-sacs and curvilinear layouts, with no alleys.
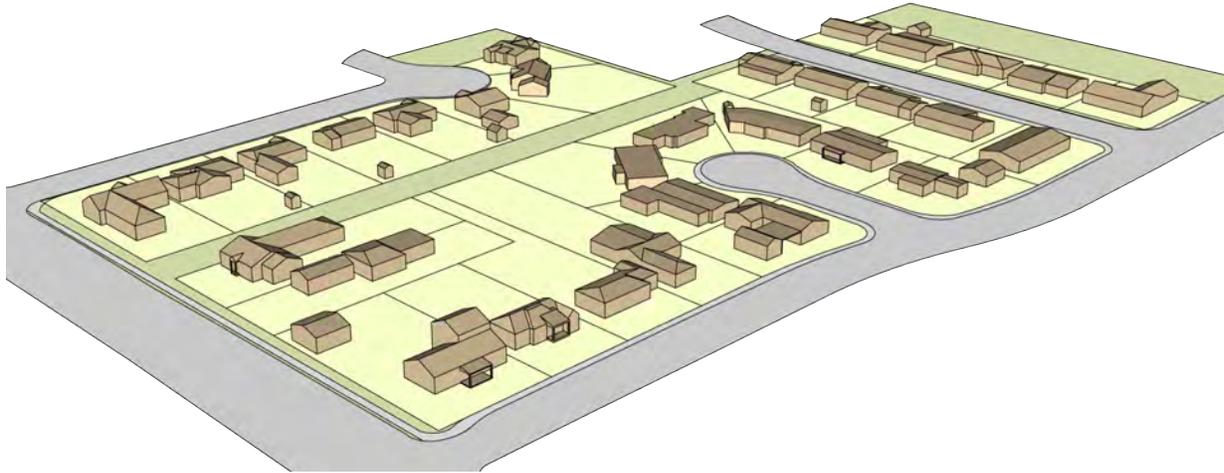
Existing Regulations Summary

The zoning code establishes the basic use and dimensional requirements for additions and new construction in the Eastside and Westside neighborhoods. There are two zone districts within the study area, the Neighborhood Conservation Low Density (NCL) and the Neighborhood Conservation Medium Density (NCM).

Neighborhood Conservation Low Density (NCL)

Buildable Area

The transparent blue "building envelope," illustrated on the example lot below, is the area of a lot in which it is permissible to build. Additional regulations will then limit the size and type of structures allowed within the envelope. The buildable area of a lot in the NCL is determined by its setbacks.
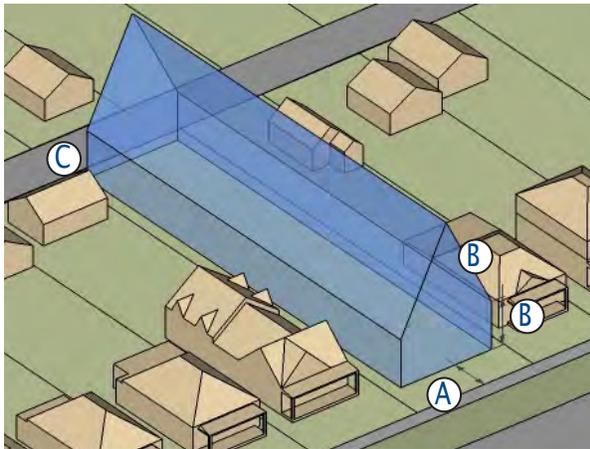
Existing regulations that shape the building envelope in the NCL zone district include:

Ⓐ **Min. front setback:** 15' (20' for a garage)

Ⓑ **Min. side setback:** 5' plus 1' for every 2' of height over 18'

Ⓒ **Min. rear setback:** 5' (15' if no alley)

Building Mass and Form

The size and form of a building within the NCL building envelope is regulated by the following tools:

Max. FAR: 0.40 (Total square footage limited to 40% of lot area)

Max. rear FAR: Square footage in rear half of the lot limited to 12.5% of total lot area

Ⓓ **Required entry feature:** Porch, landing or portico

Ⓔ **Max. roof pitch:** 12:12 (shown), min. 2:12

Ⓕ **Max. height:** 2 stories

Accessory Buildings

There is no limit on the number of accessory buildings allowed in the NCL district beyond the total allowable FAR. Accessory dwellings are allowed by administrative review in the NCL district, and are also not limited in number.

Ⓖ **Max. accessory building height:** 1.5 stories or 24' (20' if not habitable), with a max. roof eave height 13'

Sample One–Story NCL Building Form
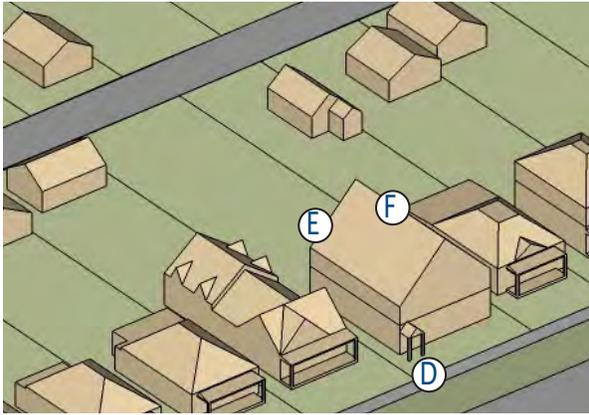
This basic two–story form illustrates one possible configuration for a house that maximizes the building area permitted within the NCL building envelope on the sample lot.

Sample Two–Story NCL Building Form
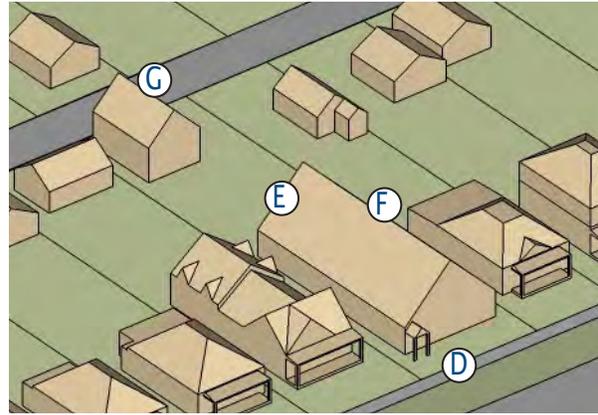
This basic one–story form, with accessory structure, illustrates another possible configuration for a house that maximizes the building area permitted within the NCL building envelope on the sample lot.

Neighborhood Conservation Medium Density (NCM)

Buildable Area

The transparent blue "building envelope," illustrated on the example lot below, is the area of a lot in which it is permissible to build. Additional regulations will then limit the size and type of structures allowed within the envelope. The buildable area of a lot in the NCM zone is determined by its setbacks.
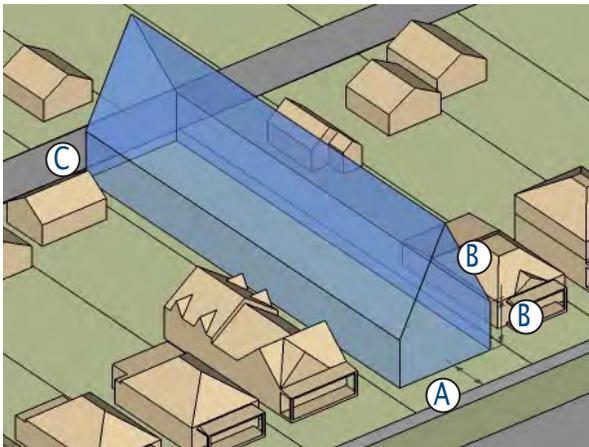
Existing regulations that shape the building envelope in the NCM zone district include:

Ⓐ **Min. front setback:** 15' (20' for a garage)

Ⓑ **Min. side setback:** 5' plus 1' for every 2' of height over 18'

Ⓒ **Min. rear setback:** 5' (15' if no alley)

Building Mass and Form

The size and form of a building within the NCM building envelope is regulated by the following tools:

Max. FAR: 0.50 (Total square footage limited to 50% of lot area)

**Max. rear FAR:** Square footage in rear half of the lot limited to 16.7% of total lot area

Ⓓ **Required entry feature:** Porch, landing or portico

Ⓔ **Max. roof pitch:** 12:12 (shown), min. 2:12

Ⓕ **Max. height:** 2 stories

Accessory Buildings

There is no limit on the number of accessory buildings allowed in the NCL district beyond the total allowable FAR. Accessory dwellings are allowed by administrative review in the NCM district, and are also not limited in number.

Ⓖ **Max. accessory building height:** 1.5 stories or 24' (20' if not habitable), with a max. roof eave height 13'

Sample Two-Story NCM Building Form
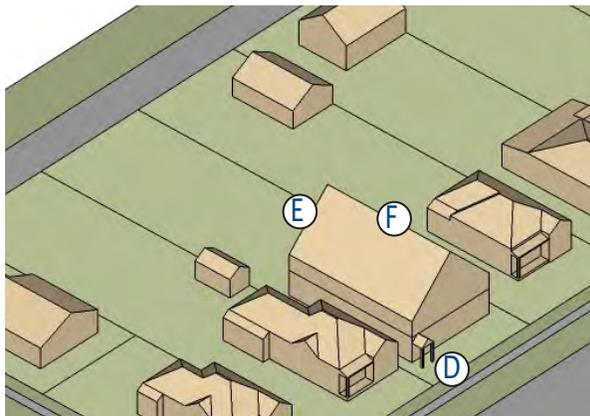
This basic two-story form illustrates one possible configuration for a house that maximizes the building area permitted within the NCM building envelope on the sample lot.

Sample One-Story NCM Building Form
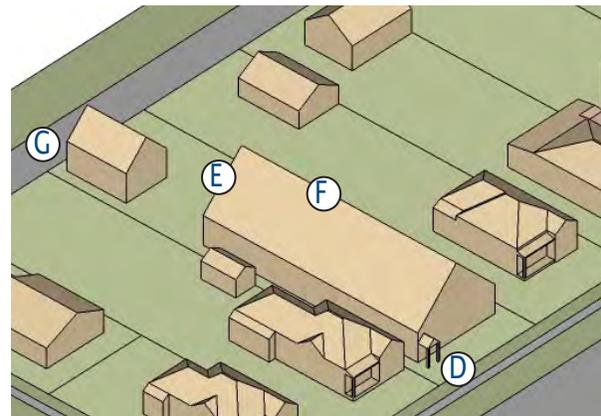
This basic one-story form, with accessory structure, illustrates another possible configuration for a house that maximizes the building area permitted within the NCM building envelope on the sample lot.

Recent Trends

Across the country many established residential neighborhoods have been experiencing significant changes after years of relative stability. Over the last fifteen years residents began to notice changes in their neighborhoods such as increased house size and height on additions and new construction. Such changes are indicative of current market trends in which established neighborhoods are becoming more desirable places to live. In some cases, such changes were seen as exciting opportunities. In other cases, residents worried that inappropriate changes could ruin the character of their neighborhood.

Overview of Recent Development Trends

The Eastside and Westside Neighborhoods have experienced changes similar to those occurring in many other established residential neighborhoods nationwide. Most activity in the Eastside and Westside neighborhoods has been additions, which are often of substantial size relative to the existing structure. Both neighborhoods are also experiencing demolition and new construction, with replacement structures generally being significantly larger than the demolished homes.

Trends by Neighborhood

Both the Eastside and Westside neighborhoods are experiencing significant construction activity. However, the majority of activity (72% of all projects) is occurring in the Westside neighborhood. The Westside also has a higher percentage of new construction by comparison with the Eastside. 7% of recent activity in the Westside is new home construction and 92% is remodels, while only 3% of activity on the Eastside is new home construction, and 98% is remodels.

Development Trends Summary

Westside Neighborhood

New Homes	7% Construction Activity
FAR	0.17–0.50 (avg. 0.32)
Square Footage	1,465–3,653 s.f. (avg. 2,376 s.f.)
Additions	93% Construction Activity

Eastside Neighborhood

New Homes	2% Construction Activity
FAR	0.17–0.50 (avg. 0.32)
Square Footage	780–2,340 s.f. (avg. 1,530 s.f.)
Additions	98% Construction Activity

Recent new construction projects in the Westside have generally been larger than those on the Eastside. New homes built recently on the Westside range from 1,465 to 3,653 square feet with an average square footage of 2,376 and an average floor area ratio (FAR) of 0.32. New homes built recently on the Eastside range from 780 to 2,340 square feet with an average square footage of 1,530, and an average FAR of 0.22.
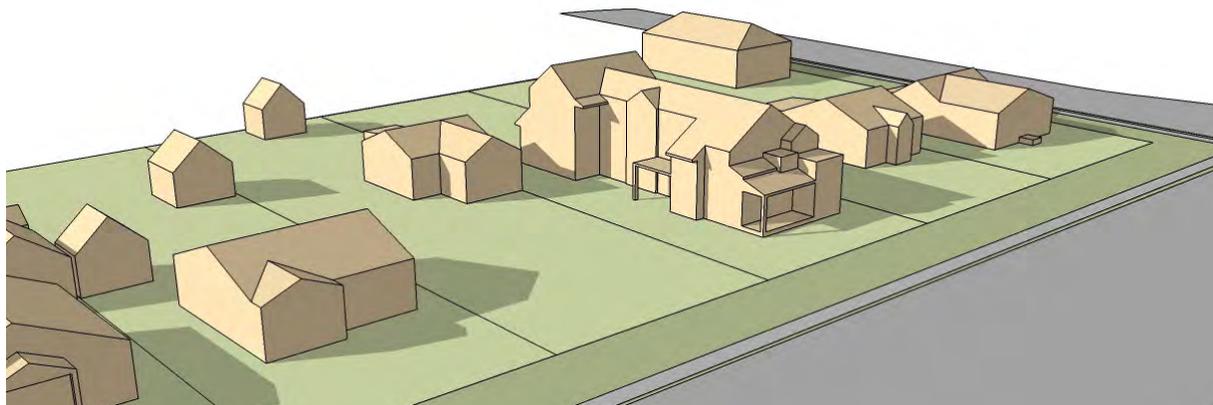
Recent new construction projects in the Westside have generally been larger than those on the Eastside.

Trends by Development Pattern and Lot Type

Within each neighborhood, development trends may vary by different existing development patterns (see "Development Patterns" on page 5 for more information) or on different lot types. Such differing circumstances may also influence how new construction is perceived (i.e., concerns may be greater when a lot is subdivided to allow for the construction of two new homes, or when new construction occurs on an especially large or small lot). Additional evaluation will be necessary to determine the relationship between different development patterns and lot types. Two initial areas of evaluation will include:

- **Lots Large Enough to Subdivide.** The subdivision of lots was mentioned in the community feedback as a potential area of concern. Based on the minimum lot frontage and parcel sizes required, approximately 5% of lots on the Eastside and 3% of lots of the Westside could be subdivided.

- **Large Lots in Predominantly Small-lot Blocks.** Due to the variety of lot and alley forms in the neighborhoods there are several areas where significantly larger lots occur on a block of predominately smaller lots. About 3% of the lots in both the Eastside and Westside neighborhoods are significantly larger (at least 3,000 square feet greater) than most others on their block.

Community Comments

Neighborhood residents, owners, and other interested citizens provided a substantial body of comments and feedback on key topics. Preliminary focus groups, an online questionnaire, and neighborhood workshops provided the main channels for engagement. Notes from each opportunity for engagement are summarized below, followed by overall "Observations and Themes" from all activities.

Preliminary Focus Groups

On June 14, 2012 the City hosted three preliminary focus group meetings for the purpose of providing feedback and advice to the study team. The meetings were provided for a sampling of:

1. Industry professionals in real estate, construction, or architecture who have worked in the neighborhoods
2. Eastside residents
3. Westside residents

There was no deliberation, and the outcome was simply for the study team to gain additional perspective as the project was being launched publicly.

At each session, City staff provided a general introduction and project consultants facilitated meeting discussion. Participants each simply answered several questions.

Many focus group participants indicated that the meeting format supported useful dialogue, and expressed desire to participate in future meetings with a similar format. However, some participants indicated that future sessions should include a wider range of viewpoints to begin a process of deliberation and conflict resolution.

Each focus group session is briefly summarized on the following pages.
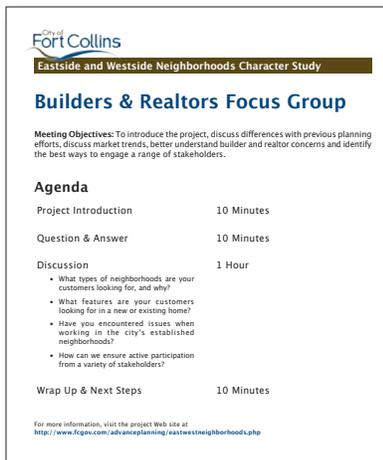
Preliminary Observations

Based on focus group and workshop feedback, builders, realtors and other design industry professionals generally feel that regulations should be kept simple. In many cases they also indicated that they felt over-regulation could damage residential neighborhoods. See "Observations and Themes" on page 27 for additional information.

Builders and Realtors Focus Group

This meeting included a total of nine builders, realtors, and architects, including a representative from the Fort Collins Board of Realtors. Participants answered four key questions posed by the consultant team:

- What types of neighborhoods are your customers looking for, and why?
- What features are your customers looking for in a new or existing home?
- Have you encountered issues when working in the city's established neighborhoods?
- How can we ensure active participation from a variety of stakeholders?

A key theme was that the neighborhoods are highly successful in the market, with some of the highest values and shortest times on the market for sellers. This is related to concerns that any new regulations or requirements for construction would negatively affect the market and unduly limit owners' flexibility. Additional points included:

- Old Town neighborhoods are highly desirable.
- The market for Old Town properties has significantly outperformed the market in more suburban areas.
- Buyers seek pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods with a sense of community and architectural diversity.
- Buyers most often seek 1,500 to 2,200 square foot homes with two to three bedrooms.
- Most buyers do not want to be subject to restrictive homeowner's association rules.
- The complexity of current regulations is an issue for clients.
- Current floor area ratio standards for the rear half of lots are overly restrictive on shallow lots in some parts of the neighborhood.
- The 2010 NCL and NCM zoning ordinance would have created a high level of non-conforming structures.
- In some cases, residents may not be sufficiently informed when demolition or new construction projects are proposed.
- Outreach should include the entire community rather than just neighborhood residents.

Neighborhood Focus Groups

Two meetings of residents were held for Eastside and Westside areas respectively. 15 Eastside residents and 14 Westside residents participated in the groups. Participants answered four key questions:

- What are some key assets of your neighborhood?
- Do you have any concerns, or do you see specific benefits, with the types of changes occurring in your neighborhood?
- What information do you need to make informed decisions about the future of your neighborhood?
- How can we ensure active community engagement?

Key themes revolved around the neighborhoods as great places to live with a strong sense of community. One theme was concern with some new construction negatively impacting neighborhood character and quality of life. However, questions also arose regarding the appropriateness of limiting owner's choices, given the degree of subjectivity in what is compatible. Another theme was appreciation for the effort to convene the meetings and interest in additional meetings to delve further into issues.

Other notable points included:

- Skepticism that the current study would lead to meaningful changes considering the outcome of past planning efforts
- Concern that organized economic interests inherently have more power than residents
- Feeling that much renovation and new construction has been positive
- Concern with potential size, volume, height and privacy impacts of some new construction
- Concern with potential for HOA-style regulations addressing architectural style, color or other design details
- Concern that current allowance for significantly larger houses may drive demolition pressure
- Interest in access to information about changes occurring in the neighborhoods (ability to see proposed plans on the City's website, etc.)
- Interest in additional dialogue regarding changes occurring in the neighborhoods (meetings to discuss new construction, etc.)
- Interest in grassroots neighborhood meetings
- Interest in information about potential design tools and strategies used by other communities
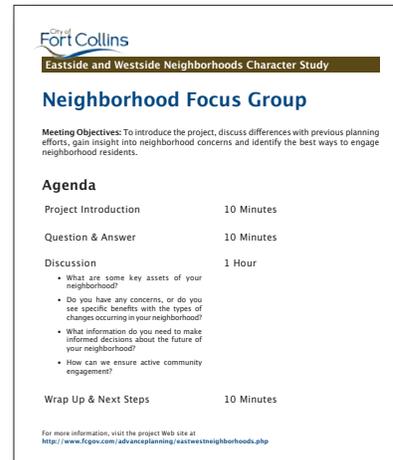
Neighborhood Assets

Neighborhood assets most often identified by focus group participants were:

- Variety/Diversity
- Historic charm and character
- Proximity to CSU, the library, Old Town, civic institutions and parks
- Walkability and bike-friendliness
- Reinvestment in improvements
- Overall "vibe"

Preliminary Observations

Based on focus group and workshop feedback, many residents feel that design diversity is a key neighborhood asset. However, they also feel that some new construction is not a good fit within the existing diverse context. Such residents may favor strategies that protect and enhance design diversity while addressing mass and scale or other impacts associated with a relatively small number of new construction projects that "don't fit." See "Observations and Themes" on page 27 for additional information.

Neighborhood Workshops

On July 10 and 12, the City hosted neighborhood workshops to introduce the project, explore neighborhood character, explore aspects of design that affect compatibility of new construction, and consider current regulations. Two workshops were conducted in the Eastside and Westside neighborhoods respectively, with a total attendance of about 95 participants. An invitation letter was mailed to all owners and residents in the study area. Participants were also invited via email and the City's website. Each neighborhood workshop began with a visual presentation by the project consultants. The presentation addressed:

- The planning process
- Existing context
- Development trends
- Existing regulations
- Potential tools to address neighborhood character
- Design alternatives
- Aspects of design

Workshop participants then completed four activities in teams of four to eight participants. At the conclusion of the workshops, participants from each team presented their activity results.

Key comments and themes from each workshop are summarized on the next page, followed by a summary of the results from each of the workshop activities.

Eastside Neighborhood Workshop

About 30 participants attended the Eastside workshop at Laurel Elementary School on July 10. Many participants expressed a desire to find tools to protect specific elements of neighborhood character while also preserving design flexibility for owners and preserving neighborhood affordability. Additional themes in the discussion included:

- Participants often cited the mature tree canopy as a key neighborhood asset
- Participants generally agreed on the key features of new development that influence neighborhood character and compatibility.
- Participants generally agreed that compatible building massing would help new construction fit into the neighborhood.
- Some participants stated that even though the activities identified aspects of design that help buildings fit in, they felt that the potential for incompatible development was exaggerated.

Note that additional participant feedback is provided in "Workshop Activities" beginning on page 20.

Westside Neighborhood Workshop

About 65 participants attended the Westside workshop at Putnam Elementary School on July 12. Many participants expressed an interest in preserving the design diversity of the neighborhood while ensuring that new construction does not have negative impacts on neighborhood character. Additional themes in the discussion included:

- Participants often cited City Park, historic homes, alleys and Beaver's Market key neighborhood assets.
- Some participants expressed interest in tools to support neighborhood consultation and dialogue.
- Some participants indicated that any tools to address neighborhood character should be highly context sensitive (including consideration of adjacent properties.

Note that additional participant feedback is provided in "Workshop Activities" beginning on page 20.

Preliminary Observations

Many workshop participants expressed general consensus on neighborhood assets, objectives and potential concerns. However, they often expressed a diversity of opinion on possible future strategies or actions. See "Observations and Themes" on page 27 for additional information.
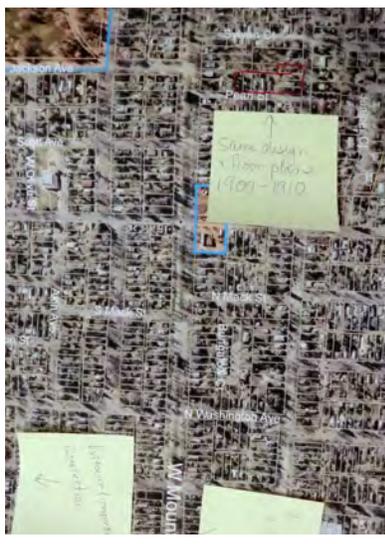
Participants marked neighborhood contexts, unique subareas and specific concerns on an aerial map of the Eastside or Westside neighborhood.

Preliminary Observations

While workshop participants often cited features that are common to the neighborhoods, they also identified many unique areas and contexts. This may suggest that future strategies should take specific contextual considerations into account. See "Observations and Themes" on page 27 for additional information.

Workshop Activities

Participants at each neighborhood workshop completed four team activities designed to stimulate discussion and generate feedback on neighborhood assets, existing context, compatible design features, and existing regulations. Teams spent about 30 minutes completing each activity. An individual worksheet was also available for participants to provide comments apart from the team activities.

Activity #1: Existing Conditions

This was a two-part activity. Participants first identified and listed existing neighborhood assets. They then identified different subareas or "contexts" within their neighborhood.

In the first part of the activity, commonly cited assets included:

- Diversity of house size, design and resident income
- Lack of architectural or other HOA-type restrictions
- Proximity to Downtown
- Walkability and bicycle access
- Wide streets
- Mature tree canopy and landscaping

In the second part of the activity, participants marked neighborhood contexts, unique subareas and specific concerns on a poster map of the Eastside or Westside. Common map themes included:

- Identification of subareas anchored by community resources such as schools and parks
- Identification of neighborhood contexts differentiated by street layout, building age, ownership patterns, or level of renovation and new construction

Unique contexts identified by Eastside residents included:

- Area near Riverside Avenue (noise/visual impacts associated with adjacent commercial and industrial areas)
- Circle Drive neighborhood
- Centennial High School park area

Unique contexts identified by Westside residents included:

- Area of similar houses on Pearl Street between Laporte and West Mountain
- Areas of "oversized construction" in the northeastern part of the neighborhood
- Bungalow streets with limited setbacks

Activity #2: Design Features

In this activity, participants cut, pasted and captioned photographs of neighborhood houses and streetscapes to identify design features of homes that fit with their neighborhoods.

Participants identified features that are characteristic of a compatible "Old Town" home, including:

- Front porches and general street presence
- Front yard trees
- Small scale
- Larger structures with varied massing

Participants identified features that are generally out of character with the Eastside and Westside, including:

- Facades dominated by garage doors or parking areas
- Houses that appear to be significantly more massive than the structures around them

In many cases, participants also indicated that context influences the appropriateness of design features. They identified features that could be appropriate in some, but not all, areas of the neighborhoods, including:

- Visible garage doors or parking areas
- Very large homes
- Ultramodern designs using contemporary materials
- Especially large or small front yard areas

Participants used photographs of traditional neighborhoods and new construction to identify design features that help make properties compatible with their neighborhoods.
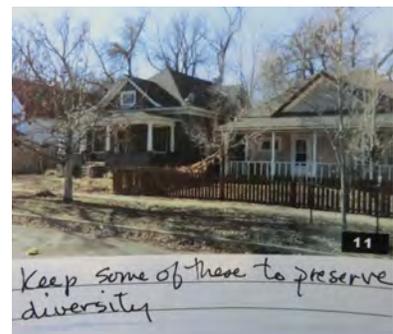
Photographs illustrating gener- ous front porches and exist- ing small scale character were among those most often selected as illustrating appropriate de- sign features.

Participants reviewed a variety of hypothetical new construction designs on a sample lot in one of five neighborhood contexts.

Participants identified a number of design features that could help reduce the perceived mass and scale of new construction and help it fit in with its surrounding context, including front porches, dormers, varied rooflines, one-story elements and side wall offsets.

Activity #3: Design Alternatives

In this activity, participants reviewed a variety of hypothetical new construction designs on a sample lot in one of five neighborhood contexts. Participants indicated whether they felt that each design was compatible with its surrounding context and identified any illustrated design features that helped promote compatibility.

Each context was illustrated with a three dimensional computer model of existing conditions in a three to four block area of the Eastside or Westside neighborhoods. New construction designs on the sample lot in each context illustrated a number of variables, including height, lot coverage (the percent of the lot covered by buildings), building square footage and wall length/articulation. Understanding which design variables contribute most to neighborhood compatibility will help determine how new construction can best fit into a variety of neighborhood contexts.

Participants identified a number of design features that could help reduce the perceived mass and scale of new construction and help it fit in with its surrounding context. Identified features included:

- One-story elements along the side of a two story house where the context is one story
- One-story element in front
- Side wall offsets
- Traditional roof pitch
- Ridge line offsets
- Consistent spacing, rhythm of buildings along the block

Participants also identified concerns, including:

- The proportion of a building to the size of its lot
- Large, boxy building masses that are out of character with their surrounding context
- Wall height, in relation to closeness of side yard set back
- Loss of solar access for properties to the north

Activity #4: Existing Regulations

In this activity, participants reviewed and provided comments on the zoning regulations that currently apply to new construction in the Eastside and Westside.

Existing zoning regulations in the Neighborhood Conservation Low Density (NCL) and Neighborhood Conservation Medium Density (NCM) zone districts were illustrated on a graphic poster. See "Existing Regulations Summary" on page 10 for more information.

Participants identified a number of concerns, including:

- Concern that additional regulations could limit design flexibility and produce higher costs
- Concern that existing regulations do not adequately address context or promote neighborhood dialogue
- Concern that structures built on raised grade may tower over neighbors based on the existing height measurement system
- Concern with ease of obtaining height and setback variances

Individual Worksheet

In addition to the four formal team activities, an individual worksheet was provided for workshop participants to submit optional comments and feedback related to the project. In addition to space for general comments, the worksheet included several of the same questions as the online questionnaire summarized on the next page.

About a third of participants at each workshop completed an individual worksheet. All indicated that they were property owners in the neighborhoods.

Key themes in the worksheet responses include:

- Many participants indicated that there are both benefits and concerns associated with changes in the neighborhoods, including benefits associated with larger houses for new families and concerns with loss of green space and solar access
- Most participants (74%) felt that there is an issue with some new construction in the neighborhoods, although many felt that issues were limited to certain areas of the neighborhoods, or to a small number of projects
- Few participants (11%) specifically indicated that they thought there was no issue with new construction in the neighborhoods

Participants reviewed and provided comments on the zoning regulations that currently shape new construction in the Eastside and Westside.
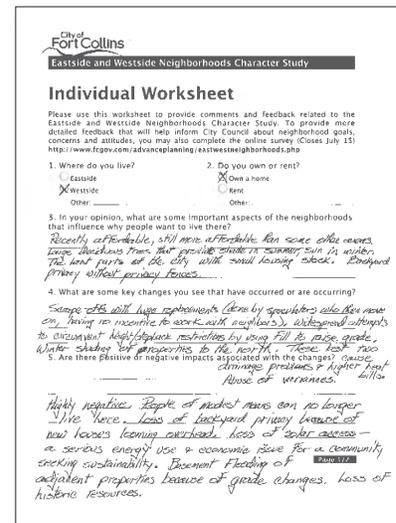
Preliminary Observations

Based on workshop participant responses, addressing potential new construction issues in focused ways (i.e., only addressing the largest structures or particular types of lots) could satisfy most concerns. See "Observations and Themes" on page 27 for additional information.
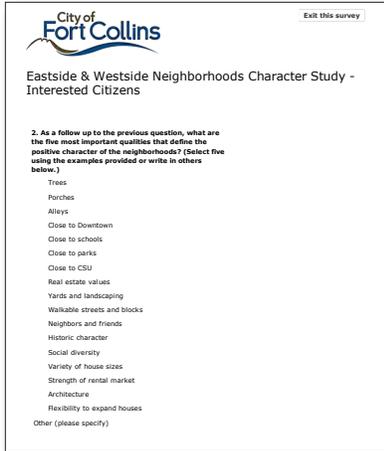
Neighborhood Questionnaire

City staff and project consultants prepared an online questionnaire to collect information on valued qualities, clarify neighborhood objectives and identify potential issues and concerns. Separate (but identical) question-naires were targeted to property owners, tenants and the general public (interested citizens), allowing for separate response tabulation for each group of partici-pants.

City staff mailed 5,579 notices to owners and residents living within either the Eastside or Westside neighbor-hoods requesting they take the questionnaire. The three online questionnaires were available for par-ticipants July 2–15. Property owners within these neighborhoods taking the questionnaire totaled 115 respondents. Residents or tenants within these neigh-borhoods totaled 15 respondents. Interested citizens taking the questionnaire totaled 158 respondents, with a combined total of 288 respondents.

Key Themes

An initial evaluation of questionnaire results indicates two key themes in participant responses:

1. ## Most participants feel there is an issue with new construction, but it may be limited to particular circumstances.

   When asked to mark statements with which they agree regarding demolitions, new houses and additions, most participants in all three ques-tionnaires selected options indicating that they feel there is an issue. However, they indicate that issues generally occur only in certain areas or situ-ations within the neighborhoods, or are limited to a small number of construction projects.

Among homeowners, 18% indicated that they believe there is a widespread issue, 28% indicated that there is an issue in certain areas or situations within the neighborhoods and 30% indicated that they believe there is an issue or concern that is limited to a small number of construction projects. By contrast, 26% indicated that they have no issue or concerns. Responses from tenants and interested citizens indicate a similar pattern although interested citizens express a somewhat higher level of concern (only 15% indicate that they have no issue or concern with new construction).

When asked to clarify why new construction may create negative impacts, most homeowners (56%) indicated that some new construction is too large relative to existing neighborhood houses, diminishes the unique character and context of the neighborhood (56%), or is too tall relative to existing neighborhood houses (55%) – Note that many homeowners selected more than one potential negative impact, so responses total more than 100%. Homeowners also cited diminished solar access, decreased socioeconomic diversity, fewer "funky" properties and a number of other potentially negative aspects of neighborhood change in write-in responses.

2. Many participants feel that some new construction is positive for the neighborhoods.

Although most participants feel that there is some issue with new construction, many also indicated that some new construction and additions can benefit the neighborhoods.

When asked to select potential reasons why there is no problem with new construction and demolitions in the neighborhoods, 53% of homeowners indicated that new construction mixed with older homes adds to the eclectic evolution of the neighborhood, and 45% indicated that larger new construction supports families and homeownership. Homeowners also cited improved landscaping, increasing property values, higher rates of homeownership and a number of other potentially positive aspects of neighborhood change in write-in responses.

3. Participants expressed significant agreement on key neighborhood assets.

When asked about the five most important qualities that define the positive character of the neigh-borhoods, homeowners, tenants and interested citizens most often cited "proximity to Downtown" as the most important neighborhood asset. Other commonly cited assets amongst all three groups of questionnaire participants were:

- Trees
- Walkable streets and blocks
- Historic character

Some participants also cited "architecture" and "neighbors and friends" as key neighborhood assets.

Additional Questionnaire Results

Questionnaire participants provided significant addi-tional feedback, including extensive written comments. They also responded to a series of demographic and other background questions. Responses to these questions are currently being evaluated and cross-tab-ulated with other questionnaire results.

Observations and Themes

First, the key question related to this phase of the project:

"What is the extent and nature of concerns and issues regarding changes to neighborhood character?"

From across the spectrum of several community engagement methods, there is a consistent tone of concern that there is an issue with changes resulting from demolitions and new construction.

But this is not a universally held viewpoint. Many people, in all outreach venues, have said there is not a problem; or that no new regulatory changes should be made. These concerns are important to consider, and identifying ways to respond to them is still an area of exploration.

Common Themes

In reviewing the preliminary research related to existing conditions, and considering the comments received in focus groups, neighborhood workshops and from the questionnaire, some general themes emerge:

1. The neighborhoods are highly valued.

This is perhaps stating the obvious, but a strong point of consensus is the belief that the Eastside and Westside Neighborhoods are special. Many of the reasons for saying so are also broadly recognized, even among those who disagree about the character and impacts of new construction. This is reflected in the passion with which residents and property owners engage in debates about the future of their neighborhoods.

2. Key features that define the neighborhoods are broadly recognized.

The valued characteristics of these neighborhoods focus on convenient location, a walking-oriented environment, and diversity. The main themes of neighborhood character can be grouped thus:

- **Sense of Community.** These broad, somewhat intangible characteristics are those that have attracted people to these neighborhoods for decades.

- **Proximity to amenities.** Almost universally, people cite the convenient access to downtown, to schools and parks, to groceries, CSU, and other services as "top of mind" features.

- **Livable Streets.** Tree-lined streets, continuity of pedestrian and bicycle routes, and a walkable scale to each block are features people note. Homes that face the street, and signal a connection to it with porches and other friendly features contribute to this aspect.

- **Diversity.** "Diversity" is a double-edged discussion, but it is a fundamental feature of these neighborhoods, in terms of people and the built environment. The term is used in a variety of ways, to describe people, their beliefs and their social, economic and cultural differences. It also is used to describe differences in the built environment, specifically in house size, period and style. For some, the diversity of buildings and people is used as a rationale for accommodating new buildings that are different, and thereby add to the diversity of the area.

  Others are concerned that, by expanding the range of diversity with new buildings that are different, some of the existing diversity will be diluted, even replaced. But, it probably should be noted that for most people in these discussions "diversity" is within a somewhat limited range, or at least that is implied. For example, some of the diversity in building size and design involves a variety of houses within a certain era or set of similar characteristics.

3. Use of key design tools can help buildings fit into the neighborhoods.

Although design diversity is a key feature of the neighborhoods, it is also recognized that there are key building design tools that designers can use to make new buildings more compatible with existing neighborhood character in certain contexts. Such tools generally address basic mass and scale rela-tionships between properties as well as preserva-tion of open space and solar access.

4. Living with change is a challenge.

Residents are struggling to grasp the nature of change in their neighborhoods. Most recognize that change will occur, and believe that it should, but many hope that this change will not completely transform the place where they live. While some people argue that those with reservations about change should just "get over it, change has always been part of the neighborhoods", this is a concern that should be addressed.

In considering the changes that have occurred, residents have expressed these key concerns:

- Some new construction is out of scale.
- Some new construction negatively impacts solar access opportunities.
- Some new construction causes demolition of buildings that undermines unique historic character.

Issues and Concerns

Moving forward, the information collected in this first phase highlights areas that need further investigation and public debate. These issues and concerns may be grouped as follows:

Regulation Issues

Some participants advocate for stronger regulations, to minimize impacts of new, larger buildings. But many participants, including some who believe there "is an issue," are wary of stricter regulations. A common theme related to positive features in the neighborhoods, as expressed in workshops and focus groups, is that there is "No Homeowner's Association." (Which can be in-terpreted to mean there should be no stringent design standards or guidelines.) A significant proportion of participants, however, do believe that some action on the part of the City is needed.

Some participants indicate that any changes to regu-lations, if they are to be modified, should be kept to a minimum, should not discourage investment, and should focus on specific, limited problems. This may be an important concept to pursue further. That is: "To what extent can the issues of mass and scale be linked to very specific conditions in the neighborhood?" If the most serious concerns occur on lots of very specific types, or on blocks with certain characteristics, it may be possible to focus on those situations as part of a new strategy in the next phase of the study. This also relates to suggestions that projects should be more "context sensitive," while keeping regulations simple.

Education & Awareness

Participants expressed an important value: "People making major changes should understand the essence of the Eastside and Westside neighborhoods and should not have to be told what fits in." Several participants advocated for a "pattern book," or similar design handbook to guide projects that would be compatible with their neighbors. Other methods of encouraging thoughtful design should be explored in the next phase.

Process Concerns

Many participants continue to express the desire to engage in discussions with their neighbors when a project is planned, even if in an informal way.

Next Steps

A key concept from this stage is that the community needs to engage in a creative problem-solving mode, not one of polarizing positions. That is, to acknowledge that many people hold concerns about current conditions, and to engage in conversations about how to address them. The focus should be on promoting the features that make an "Old Town Home."

An extensive amount of information has been collected in this initial stage of defining existing conditions, values and issues. Considering these responses and the substantial amount of information collected in the previous planning work, preliminary results indicate that these concepts should be considered next:

Conduct additional analysis of specific site variables that may affect infill.

In workshops, participants identified some special site conditions under which out of scale building could occur. For example, there are some blocks in which one or two parcels are much deeper in length than the typical lots in the block. When calculating permitted house size for these larger lots using the existing Floor Area Ratio, it yields a much larger house than could be built on adjoining properties. Other issues occur on very narrow lots.

More detailed research of GIS data will help to identify specific property types where infill might be more likely to cause an issue. It may be that many of the issues can be isolated to specific conditions, which can then be addressed. This analysis will enable the discussions to focus more precisely on those conditions where the critical changes could occur.

Although the questionnaire samples are relatively small, at under 3% of all residents and owners, they are fairly consistent with the survey conducted two years ago and with the sentiments expressed in recent workshops and focus groups. A key response to focus on is the opinion that the issues can be localized to specific geographic locations or in some other ways isolated to more sensitive conditions.

Conduct community discussions to focus on points of consensus.

In this next phase, representatives of stakeholder groups and community advocates should join in problem-solving conversations, to move beyond basic statements related to "is there a problem" to "how do we address it in a way that is mutually acceptable?"

These discussions would proceed in these venues:

1. Focus groups

A new set of focus groups would be conducted, in which participants from different viewpoints would work together to develop a strategy for action. These meetings will seek to find points of consensus and outline potential actions.

2. Community workshops

In a second set of workshops, participants will investigate specific ideas for addressing concerns. They will test concepts generated in the second round of focus groups and help craft points of consensus.

3. Administer a "visual survey" to test the creative design techniques.

The initial questionnaire focused on defining issues and concerns. This second survey would include a range of pictures, illustrate alternative design strategies that can help larger buildings fit with their neighbors, and provide opportunities to evaluate their effectiveness. These would be tested in the different design contexts that have been identified.

4. Discussions with Boards and Commissions

This would allow discussion of concepts emerging from the focus groups and community workshops.

Develop a strategy for action.

This would evolve from the next phase of community discussions and will focus on defining the range of actions that should be considered.

The range of actions would be considered in these categories:

- Regulations and Incentives
- Education and Awareness
- Process and Administration

A strategy report would outline the recommended action in sufficient detail to facilitate informed discussions in the community. This work effort will include considerations of economic factors and will draw upon experience in other communities who have implemented similar programs.

This strategy paper will then be presented to City Council. Based on their direction, then the actual tools for implementation would be developed in Phase 3 of this project.