



Overlook Neighborhood Association

2209 N Schofield St
Portland, OR 97217

April 15, 2008

Planning Commission
1900 SW Fourth Ave, Suite 7100
Portland, OR 97201

Re: Proposed North Interstate Corridor Plan

The following comments were unanimously approved by the Overlook Neighborhood Association on April 15, 2008. They are designed to highlight some of the key issues and concerns shared by the neighborhood regarding the rezoning of the Interstate Corridor.

The proposed changes in the Interstate Corridor will bring significant changes to our neighborhood. While we appreciate the work the Planning Bureau has done in listening to our concerns and ideas and incorporating them into their proposal we do have some lingering concerns. It is a great challenge to successfully incorporate higher-density, transit-supportive development into a neighborhood that, while having a vibrant mix of uses, is primarily a single-family residential one. There is really no precedent in our city for this scale and type of development and we all have a significant stake in its success. Because of that, we hope you will seriously consider our requests.

The following are our primary concerns and suggested changes to the proposed plan.

Need for traffic and infrastructure studies: We are very concerned that a traffic study has not been done yet and feel that this should be a prerequisite for proceeding. To do otherwise could result in excessive congestion, costly retro-fit solutions, and problems of community safety. While we support the goal of public-transit use as development occurs along the corridor, traffic will increase greatly in an area already facing congestion issues. Of particular concern are key bottleneck intersections, drivers using adjacent residential streets to avoid congestion, emergency services to areas with limited access points, and the continuing problem of truck traffic between Interstate 5 and the Albina Railyards. We are also concerned about similar stresses this density will place on water, sewer, power, and other infrastructure systems.

Planning for parks: The jump in population density planned for in the new zoning will place significant more pressure on existing parks and green spaces, particularly in the northern end of the neighborhood where they are more scarce. We would like a commitment to improving and increasing these resources with remedies such as a recalculation of park allocation money, creating pocket parks, and including incentives for the creation of green spaces.

33.561.210 Maximum Building Height: The height limit for RH and EX zones of 100', 85', and 75' in certain areas, while fitting with the Comprehensive Plan, is simply too high. Pearl or Lloyd District-sized buildings would be intimidating and utterly out of scale in this mixed-use residential neighborhood. The base zone limit of 65' would still allow for high-density development but would be much more appropriate for the corridor.

R2 transitional zoning: We believe that R2.5 rather than R2 zoning along Massachusetts and Longview Avenues in the southern end of the neighborhood would achieve a more consistent streetscape with the existing R5 neighborhood on the west side of the street and 5,000 square-foot lot sizes while still achieving the goal of a higher density transition zone.

33.561.230 Transition Between Zones: Though we recognize the challenges associated with the transition from EX or RH to R2 or R2.5, the proposed amendment for setbacks and stepdowns between EX or RH and R2 or R2.5 is not sufficient. This is particularly true in areas with 65' height limits (or 75' as currently proposed) abutting residential zones.

RH along Interstate Ave.: There are pockets of RH along Interstate Avenue that we feel should be rezoned as EX. This would allow greater flexibility for potential uses and achieve greater zoning consistency. RH zoning limits options for property owners by requiring four stories of housing on top of commercial space- a project many property owners in the corridor are unable to undertake. If the concern is a no net loss of housing it should be recognized that the majority of EX development would include housing, resulting in no net housing loss.

33.561.100 Commercial Use in the RH Zone: We request that the commercial use allowance for the RH along Interstate Ave. be extended to the area east of Interstate Ave. Without this extension, we fear there will be unintentional restrictions on small, particularly home-based, businesses in that area.

As a model for future development, this is an important project for the city. Without proper consideration it also has the potential to negatively impact the neighborhood feel and uniqueness of the Interstate corridor. We appreciate your consideration and look forward to working with you to prevent future problems and to make this project be as successful as possible.

Thank you,

Eric Gale
Chair, Overlook Neighborhood Association