

Shape Our Fremont

Where Fremont residents can learn about shaping proposed housing developments...

Community Character is Worth Fighting For

Community character is how a neighborhood or area or city looks and feels to the people who live there. It's not just about the height or density or architecture of the buildings. It's also about the trees and streets and shops and open spaces -- and how everything works with everything else. Community character can make the difference between having a good place to live, or a bad one, and it's worth fighting for.

It's in the Plan

The Fremont General Plan includes an entire chapter on Community Character, plus a separate Place Types Manual that defines the unique characters of various types of places. Together they provide 90 pages of requirements and guidelines to define how the character of Fremont should evolve and grow into a "strategically urban city", while still protecting the past and present character.

The focus on becoming strategically urban generally means building taller, denser, residential and mixed-use (commercial/residential) developments within the city and town centers, along some major street corridors, and close to public transportation centers. New housing developments in these areas will have a limited amount of parking, open space, and trees. As you move away from these centers and corridors, the building heights and densities are supposed to decrease, and the amount of parking, open space, and trees are supposed to increase to match the community character of the surrounding area.

For example, in the five Town Centers -- which includes much of the historic business districts of Niles, Centerville, Irvington, Mission San Jose, and Warm Springs -- building heights and densities can be greater than in the areas outside the town center, but may be restricted along the main street to respect the historic size and character of the remaining structures and district. Older commercial buildings that have outlived the needs of current tenants may be renovated to attract new business tenants, rather than being torn down.

Major street corridors are also part of the community character. Urban Corridors are defined as being bordered by tall buildings set close to the street. Fremont Boulevard from Centerville to Irvington is designated as an urban corridor. So are portions of Mowry Avenue, Stevenson Boulevard, and all of Osgood Road. On the other end of the scale, Landscape Corridors are defined as being bordered by low buildings set back from the street. Most of Mission Boulevard and Paseo Padre Parkway are designated as landscape corridors. So are Walnut Avenue and Stevenson Boulevard from the BART tracks to Mission Boulevard.

Putting it to the Test

Considerations about the community character of a proposed development are sometimes buried under the mass of density figures, building heights, and property line setbacks. It's easier to evaluate numbers than it is to think about how the proposed project will fit and feel.

However the community character of a development is equally important because it affects the living environment of the residents and their neighbors.

Here are some proposed developments that will test the City's resolve to follow the Community Character element of the General Plan and not just look at the density numbers:

The Walnut Residences project at the corner of Walnut and Guardino will place 670 urban density apartments in four-story buildings with five- or six-story parking garages in an area of existing two- and three-story medium density homes and condominiums. Many neighbors say that despite numerous letters and emails, as well as several meetings with the developer, the project is still too tall and too dense and does not fit the community character of the area. This project is scheduled to go before the Planning Commission on Thursday, July 14 at 7:00 p.m.

Another example is the Decoto Road Mixed Use project, which proposes to build 299 residential units and 16,000 square feet of commercial space near the corner of Decoto Road and Fremont Boulevard. Two buildings facing Fremont will be five stories, located across from the property recently acquired for a future school. Another building facing Decoto will be four stories. Most of the existing homes in the area are two- and three-story. This project is undergoing preliminary review, and is open to comments from the public.

And in the City Center area west of the Fremont BART station, plans to create a new downtown are slowly taking shape. Because most of the existing buildings will be torn down, the challenge here is to create a new community character for the area with a mix of shops, restaurants, civic buildings, open spaces, and residences that will attract people from all over the city, not just those who live and work there.

As the City makes decisions about developing some of the last remaining land in Fremont, we should make sure we consider community character as an important part of the decision. Every resident can be part of that process.

To learn about all the proposed housing developments in Fremont, go to **www.ShapeOurFremont.com**

GOOLD HOUSE NOT SAVED

The re-evaluator of the historical significance of the Goold House in Centerville has revised his report upon realizing that there was a major addition along the side of the house in 2003.

The new conclusion says that the Goold House is indeed significant because of 'Pop' Goold, but has lost its historical integrity because of the recent modification.

The house is now not considered eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, and the Centerville Junction development application will proceed as before.

The tentative date for the Planning Commission hearing is now Thursday, July 28, 2016.