

Date

TO: Councilmember Rasmussen

FROM: SPC

RE: Potential Neighborhood Conservation District strategy

On April 9, Evan Clifthorne from your office and Lish Whitson from Council Central Staff briefed the Planning Commission about the Neighborhood Conservation District proposal that you are developing. We appreciate the information provided and the time Mr. Clifthorne took to stay after to the meeting to talk more with our members and staff. Mr. Clifthorne indicated it would be most useful to your office to receive comments quickly, before the legislative proposal is finalized, so we are offering some initial thoughts to you at this time.

We need to better understand the specific problems that you are seeking to address through Neighborhood Conservation Districts in order to provide useful feedback.

We heard from Mr. Clifthorne that Neighborhood Conservation Districts are meant to enable the community to hold onto unique aspects of their neighborhood character and make it possible for people to continue enjoying the creativity in design expressed in past generations, yet we are not clear how the program as outlined would achieve this without unintended consequences such as:

- adding to the complexity and cost involved in home upkeep, remodel and related activities in these areas particularly for low and moderate income homeowners and tenants.
- increased barriers to currently allowed redevelopment and infill in residential and commercial neighborhoods within the Neighborhood Conservation Districts,
- reductions in current and future homeowners' ability to make changes to their home or site to accommodate their households' changing needs,
- increased housing costs in areas using the program, which would make it even more difficult for low-, moderate, and middle-income households to access these areas, and
- allowing a high number of small Neighborhood Conservation District geographic boundaries (minimum of one block) to occur throughout the city with varying design guidelines without conflicting with affordability goals and equity (RSJI).

We have concerns regarding the timing of the legislation.

- Public outreach regarding the proposed program was conducted in three public meetings held over a two and a half week period and we understand legislation is targeted to be introduced in May. We feel the proposal would benefit from broader outreach and education regarding the proposal details.
- The proposed program appears at odds with the deepening affordability challenges the city is facing, and the Mayor and Council's desire to address this challenge in an integrated way as expressed in the Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda (HALA) resolution. We are

concerned that the formation of Neighborhood Conservation Districts could create potentially significant barriers for implementing many of the strategies that the HALA Committee is currently considering recommending.

- Not integrated with current project to analyze the Design Review process.
- How both tenants and property owners will be engaged in this process to provide input.

Lastly, the proposal appears to contradict many of the housing goals and policies in the Comprehensive Plan including those to:

- accommodate growth, especially within urban centers and urban villages
- achieve greater predictability in project approval timelines, achievable densities, and costs,
- achieve a mix of housing types for a diversity of households,
- encourage greater economic integration of neighborhoods for a range of income levels,
- encourage housing and commercial space affordability citywide,
- promote efficient adaptation of the city's housing stock to enable households to remain in the same home.

We appreciate your office's interest in our feedback and would be happy to meet with you in May as you further consider this proposal. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me or our Executive Director, Vanessa Murdock, at 733-9271 should you have any questions.