The Working Group Meeting #8 packet contains the following items:

1. Working Group #8 Meeting Agenda
2. Staff Memo for Working Group Meeting #8
3. Matadero Creek Improvement Concepts (WRA)
4. Article: Visualizing Compatible Density
5. NVCAP Working Group Emails
NORTH VENTURA COORDINATED AREA PLAN
WORKING GROUP MEETING
AGENDA
Tuesday, October 29, 2019
City Hall - Community Meeting Room
250 Hamilton Avenue
Palo Alto, CA 94301
5:30 PM TO 8:30 PM

Call to Order: 5:30 PM

1. Welcome and Housekeeping
2. Oral Communications

Discussion Items: 6:00 PM*

1. Update on October 21, 2019 City Council hearing: 6:00-6:15 PM
2. Creek Study consultant (WRA) introduction and scope discussion: 6:15–7:00 PM
3. Planning Alternatives- Elements of the Plan Discussion: 7:00 PM-8:15 PM

Oral Communications: 8:15 PM

Wrap Up & Adjournment: 8:30 PM

Future Meeting/Workshops:

*Listed times are estimates.
The purpose of this meeting is:

(1) To introduce the project team from WRA who will be performing the study of Matadero Creek; and
(2) To offer the Working Group members an opportunity to discuss aspects of the North Venture Coordinated Area Plan that will be addressed in the three plan alternatives.

**Matadero Creek**

The WRA team will present briefly regarding the scope of their study, describing their approach, and providing insight into the technical aspects of their work. Their scope of work is attached (Attachment A). You may also learn more about their firm by visiting their website at [https://wra-ca.com](https://wra-ca.com).

**Plan Alternatives Development**

The plan alternatives will be developed based on information provided from the Working Group, the community workshop, and both qualitative and quantitative information from multiple sources compiled into the draft existing conditions report.

Working Group members are encouraged to express their thoughts, hopes, and opinions regarding these topics so that the consultants and professional city planning staff can incorporate them into the plan alternatives.

While themes and consensus may emerge regarding certain topics that Working Group members hope to see reflected in the plan alternatives, it is equally likely that diverse and sometimes divergent ideas and preferences may emerge. Both convergence and divergence will enrich the plan alternatives.

To aid this conversation, we will revisit previously explored information as well as new resources:

(1) The City Council adopted **goals and objectives** for the NVCAP area;
(2) Inspirational **visual precedent** from vibrant places, including Palo Alto;
(3) Data and information regarding **existing conditions**, with a specific focus on housing, land uses, and circulation;
(4) Additional materials.

The information provided below and attached should be reviewed to prepare for the discussion on October 29, 2019. In addition, some reflection questions are provided that will prepare Working Group members for the discussion.

**Note:** If hard copies of documents were provided at previous Working Group meetings, the documents are not duplicated in this packet. Please refer to the hyperlink or refer to the packet from that date.

**Projects Goals & Objectives**

On March 5, 2018, the City Council adopted the following goals and objectives for the NVCAP.

The North Ventura area is roughly bounded by Page Mill Road, El Camino Real, Lambert Avenue and the Caltrain tracks in Palo Alto and represents a rare opportunity within the City to plan proactively for a true transit-oriented mixed-use neighborhood. The project area includes one of the City’s largest housing opportunity sites, which is currently occupied by Fry’s Electronics, as well as a mix of small and large businesses and single-family residences. The purpose of the North Ventura Coordinated Area Plan (NVCAP) is to provide a vision for the future of this area. The group will address areas including policies, development standards, and design guidelines. The NVCAP should strengthen the neighborhood fabric and consider infrastructure needs, providing for a mix of land uses that take advantage of the proximity of the Caltrain station, the California Avenue area, and El Camino Real.

**NVCAP Goals**

1. **Housing and Land Use**
   Add to the City’s supply of multifamily housing, including market rate, affordable, “missing middle,” and senior housing in a walkable, mixed use, transit-accessible neighborhood, with retail and commercial services and possibly start up space, open space, and possibly arts and entertainment uses.

2. **Transit, Pedestrian and Bicycle Connections**
   Create and enhance well-defined connections to transit, pedestrian, and bicycle facilities, including connections to the Caltrain station, Park Boulevard and El Camino Real.

3. **Connected Street Grid**
   Create a connected street grid, filling in sidewalk gaps and street connections to California Avenue, the Caltrain Station, and El Camino Real where appropriate.

4. **Community Facilities and Infrastructure**
Carefully align and integrate development of new community facilities and infrastructure with private development, recognizing both the community's needs and that such investments can increase the cost of housing.

5. **Balance of Community Interests**
   Balance community-wide objectives with the interests of neighborhood residents and minimize displacement of existing residents and small businesses.

   Develop human-scale urban design strategies, and design guidelines that strengthen and support the neighborhood fabric. Infill development will respect the scale and character of the surrounding residential neighborhood. Include transition zones to surrounding neighborhoods.

7. **Sustainability and the Environment**
   Protect and enhance the environment, while addressing the principles of sustainability.

**NVCAP Objectives**

1. **Data Driven Approach:** Employ a data-driven approach that considers community desires, market conditions and forecasts, financial feasibility, existing uses and development patterns, development capacity, traffic and travel patterns, historic/cultural and natural resources, need for community facilities (e.g., schools), and other relevant data to inform plan policies.

2. **Comprehensive User-Friendly Document and Implementation:** Create a comprehensive but user-friendly document that identifies the distribution, location and extent of land uses, planning policies, development regulations and design guidelines to enable development and needed infrastructure investments in the project area.

3. **Guide and Strategy for Staff and Decision Makers:** Provide a guide and strategy for staff and decision-makers to bridge the gap between the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan and individual development projects in order to streamline future land use and transportation decisions.

4. ** Meaningful Community Engagement:** Enable a process with meaningful opportunities for community engagement, within the defined timeline, and an outcome (the CAP document) that reflects the community's priorities.

5. **Economic Feasibility:** A determination of the economic and fiscal feasibility of the plan with
specific analysis of marketplace factors and incentives and disincentives, as well as a cost-benefit analysis of public infrastructure investments and projected economic benefits to the City and community.

6. Environmental: A plan that is protective of public health and a process that complies with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act.

**Visual Precedent & Inspirational Places**

On January 16, 2019, the Working Group reviewed and discussed favorite places submitted by each member. In addition, the vibrancy of each place was analyzed based on the following factors: population density, job density, retail and services, modes of transit, open space, intersection density, and tree canopy. The minutes reflect the discussion.

In preparation for our October 29, 2019 meeting, please review these images. Consider the following questions:

- Identify 3 images and places reflect housing and building types you would like to see reflected in the plan alternatives?
- What are the characteristics of these buildings?
- What are the heights of the buildings?
- What aspects of the urban form in these areas are most attractive to you?
- If some of these housing typologies are realized within the NVCAP, neighborhood population density may increase. What are the positive and negative impacts of greater population density? Are there measures that can accentuate positive impacts and minimize negative impacts?
- How does the location of the housing type in the NVCAP area alter your thoughts regarding its appropriateness? For example, do you prefer a certain type on El Camino, Alma, Olive, or Pepper streets?

Reviewing the images that reflect places and architectural styles found within Palo Alto, please reflect on the characteristics of those building types.

**Additional Information**

Working Group co-chairs also suggest reviewing:

- “Visualizing Compatible Density” (article, attached (Attachment B) and available via hyperlink)
- Current Zoning Map & Land Use Table

---

1 Materials for January 16, 2019 Meeting (this is a big file, takes time to open) https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?t=63976.82&BlobID=73839
2 Minutes from January 16, 2019 meeting: https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?t=64194.41&BlobID=73840
3 https://www.theurbanist.org/2017/05/04/visualizing-compatible-density/
Existing Conditions

The draft existing conditions report contains information regarding the NVCAP area. Consider reviewing the document with special attention to the Mobility section.  

With the mobility information in mind, reflect on the following questions:

- What are means to reduce vehicular traffic through the project area?
- What are means to increase walking, biking, and non-motorized traffic?
- How can the need to own and/or use cars be reduced for families with children? For single individuals or couples?

Reflecting on the “Mobility Considerations” presented on April 17, 2019 to the Working Group:

- Which suggestions most resonate with you? What resonates the least?
- What issues remain unaddressed?
- What opportunities for connectivity are most appealing to you? Which are least appealing?

Discussion

During the Working Group meeting, staff will lead the group through large and small group discussions. The discussions will be interactive, recorded, and ensure that Working Group members desires are reflected in the plan alternatives.
MATADERO CREEK
IMPROVEMENT CONCEPTS

SCOPE OF WORK AND ESTIMATED COST

Prepared for:

Elena Lee, Senior Planner
City of Palo Alto
Planning & Community Environment
250 Hamilton Avenue – Fifth Floor
Palo Alto, CA 94301
(650) 329-2442
Elena.Lee@cityofpaloalto.org

May 24, 2019

WRA Project No. 29113

PURPOSE

This Scope of Work describes the preparation of conceptual creek improvement designs for Matadero Creek within the North Ventura Coordinated Area Plan boundaries. It is our understanding that WRA will prepare three conceptual improvement designs that range from full naturalization to no impact. The design concepts will consider all constraints and opportunities communicated to us by Perkins + Will, along with the Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD) responses to questions dated March 27, 2019.

WORK PRODUCTS

• Three (3) Conceptual Creek Improvement Plans
• Budgetary Cost Comparison

SCOPE OF WORK

WRA will perform the services outlined below.

Task 1: Site Assessment

The WRA design lead will perform a site assessment to gain an understanding of the existing creek condition and gain perspective on the scale of the project. The assessment will include a desktop review of existing aerial photography, historical aerial photography, soils mapping, vapor intrusion area information, and preliminary Area Plan documentation. We will also conduct one site visit to photograph the existing conditions and take rough measurements of the channel. This task also includes coordination with the City and BKF team to integrate appropriate elements of the North Ventura Coordinated Area Plan (Plan) into the improvement concepts.
**Task 2: Prepare Conceptual Creek Improvement Scenarios**

Under this task, WRA will prepare three conceptual design concepts showing improvement scenarios for the approximately 800 linear feet of Matadero Creek within the Plan area for Perkins + Will to include in the Plan. The concepts will range from maximum appropriate naturalization of the channel to no interference with the existing channel. Comments from the SCVWD provided in March 2019 will be addressed. WRA will review other elements of the plan, including open space, recreation, landscaping, public access and Santa Clara Valley Water District maintenance needs, and integrate those elements into the design concept as appropriate.

Each concept will include a plan view of the creek in the Plan area, along with a typical section showing the proposed improvements. The graphics will be provided to Perkins + Will in AutoCAD or Adobe software format for inclusion into Plan documents. WRA will revise the concepts one time under this task based on input from Perkins + Will, SCVWD, the City, other agencies and information gathered during public meetings. If more than one round of revisions is required, WRA may request additional fees. A range of anticipated costs for implementation and maintenance of each scenario will be prepared by WRA and provided with the final design concepts.

**Task 3: Hydraulic Modeling**

WRA will run a preliminary surface water hydrologic and hydraulic model to inform the design of the scenarios described above. The models will be preliminary in nature and will be used to show that each of the proposed designs will not raise the 100-year water surface elevation or result in aggradation, degradation or other instability of the proposed condition. Each of the proposed designs will be represented by a typical cross section, horizontal alignment, and vertical profile. A memo describing the parameters, methodology, assumptions and limitations of the model will be provided to the City and Perkins + Will along with the final design concepts.

**Task 4: Meetings**

This task covers preparation and participation in meetings required to complete the project. Included are the following meetings. The number of meetings is included in parentheses:

- In-person project kick-off meeting with City of Palo Alto and Perkins + Will (1)
- Working Group meeting (3)
- Decision maker meeting (1)
- City Council Meetings (2)
- Meeting with SCVWD (1),
- Interagency Review Meeting – Corps, RWQCB, CDFW, NMFS, USFWS (1)
- Meeting with Architectural Board or other agencies (3)
- Video conference coordination meetings with City of Palo Alto, Perkins + Will or SCVWD (3)

All meeting costs related to materials preparation, travel and debriefing are included in the estimated fees for this task.

**Task 5: Project Management**

WRA will perform project management and coordination efforts associated with the scope of work outlined herein. Under this task, WRA will manage the work described in the scope and coordinate with City of Palo Alto, project team members, resource agencies and the SCVWD through the completion of
the work. WRA will also prepare and submit monthly invoices and coordinate project status and budget.

**SCHEDULE**

This work can begin upon receipt of authorization from the Client of this Scope of Work.

**STAFFING**

Brian Bartell will be the Project Director for the work and George Salvaggio will be the Project Manager. They will be assisted by Lead Engineer Ben Snyder. Mr. Bartell has over 20 years of stream restoration experience, and Mr. Salvaggio has over 20 years of ecological restoration and parks and open space planning experience. Mr. Snyder has extensive hydraulic modeling experience, including work on Lower Matadero Creek and other South Bay flood control channels under the jurisdiction of the SCVWD. The team will be supported by junior design staff as needed.

**ASSUMPTIONS**

The following assumptions have been made in the preparation of this Scope of Work:

- Estimated costs herein are on a time and materials basis, and completion of the project will not exceed the given budget. Should contingencies arise, WRA will inform the Client immediately,
- WRA will be granted access to the site,
- WRA will use publicly available topography and site information to prepare plans and models. If available information is found to be insufficient, WRA will perform site survey at time and materials basis at WRA’s preferred rates upon written permission from Client.
- Perkins + Will and the City will provide any relevant guiding documents to WRA at the start of the project,
- One round of revisions to the design concepts is included in this scope of work. Any additional revisions will be completed on a time and materials basis at WRA’s preferred rate upon written authorization from the client,
- Hydraulic modeling will be preliminary in nature, and based on parameters agreed upon with, and hydrology provided by, the SCVWD prior to the start of modeling,
- SCVWD will provide a rating curve for the culvert under Alma Street,
- Meetings requested by the client outside of the scope of work described above will be attended on a time and materials basis at WRA’s preferred rate,
- Final production of design concepts will be completed by Perkins + Will in their layout and formatting,

**ESTIMATED COST**

The estimated cost for the services described in this Scope of Work is provided below. This cost is based on the assumptions above, and is subject to change based on the specific conditions encountered during the conduct of this work. Costs may be reallocated between tasks, but the total cost will not be exceeded without authorization.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Site Assessment</td>
<td>$5,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Prepare Conceptual Creek Improvement Scenarios</td>
<td>$27,798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Hydraulic Modeling</td>
<td>$12,541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Meetings</td>
<td>$30,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Project Management</td>
<td>$8,352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$84,757</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Approval / Signature Page Follows)
Density is a controversial subject in virtually all American communities. While some districts and communities are seeking more density to promote economic revitalization and a host of other progressive goals, density is more often a thing to be feared. Many think that density is...
simply ugly: more and bigger buildings, more asphalt and concrete, fewer trees and green space, less sunlight and privacy, and even less air to breathe.

But with a finite amount of land to house us, communities all around the globe have come to understand the need and benefits of density (saving land and energy use, for starters). Here in Washington State, the Growth Management Act dictates that cities plan for anticipated growth, which, in many cases, means more density in areas with the infrastructure to support it.

Zoning codes all regulate density in some form. Single-family districts include lot size minimums. Multifamily districts often include a maximum number of dwelling units allowed per acre. Major political battles often erupt when density increases are proposed. Community members may fight against a proposed density number, but often they don’t know what it looks like.

Over the past few years, I’ve conducted a slideshow and discussion on density to planning commissions and committees in multiple cities. The major conclusion of the analysis is that perceptions on density depend on design. As author Julie Campoli noted in her 2007 book, *Visualizing Density*, people tend to overestimate the density of monotonous, amenity-poor developments and underestimate the density of well-designed, attractive projects, thereby reinforcing negative stereotypes.

This article shows examples of various densities in Washington State communities and closes with a summary of design elements that help to make density more compatible.

**Clarification of Gross Versus Net Density**
First, it's important to clarify how densities are measured. Zoning codes either measure density on a gross or net basis. Net density includes just individual lots in the measurements while gross density includes street rights-of-way and common areas. As a consequence, net density figures are typically 50-70% higher than gross density numbers.

Gross density measurements are often best used when looking at large developments that are likely to have internal roads and open space. Net densities are often more appropriate for neighborhood infill situations. The graphics below, courtesy of GGLO, help to explain the differences.
Density Examples

4 Dwelling Units Per Acre (Gross)

Notable features: The lack of street trees combined with a prevalence of garages and driveways. The city’s new standards, however, reduce
street widths, include wide planter strips and street trees, and de-emphasize the garage in the design of home fronts.

Newer single-family subdivision in Ellensburg.

5.3 Dwelling Units Per Acre (Gross)

Notable features: Traditional streetscapes with sidewalks, planter strips, street trees, covered entries, and a diversity of architectural styles. Access to garages is provided by an alley behind the single-family houses.

Older single-family neighborhood in Olympia.
5.9 Dwelling Units Per Acre (Gross)

Notable features: Traditional streetscape with sidewalk, street trees, shallow front setbacks and front porches. The courtyard-access lots behind the street-fronting homes add density, but its density that's largely screened from the street. Note that the second row of homes at the top and bottom of the image are accessed by private lanes.

RELATIVELY NEW SINGLE-FAMILY SUBDIVISION WITHIN THE MASTER-PLANNED SNOQUALMIE RIDGE DEVELOPMENT IN SNOQUALMIE.

7.7 Dwelling Units Per Acre (Gross)

Notable features: Consistent setbacks, shallow porches, minimal setbacks between homes, and alleys with driveway space in back. The monotonous layout and design, combined with the lack of usable open space for residents, led to updates to Lacey’s zoning and design standards.
Relatively new small-lot homes in the Hawks Prairie development in Lacey.

9.3 Dwelling Units Per Acre (Gross)

Notable features: Traditional streetscapes, a combination of front- and alley-loaded dwellings, and strategically located, common open space. The numbers below refer to duplexes (2) and triplexes (3). The remaining structures are single-family homes.

Relatively new mixed-housing type subdivision within the master-planned Issaquah Highlands development in Issaquah.
15 Dwelling Units Per Acre (Gross)

Notable features: A variety of housing types, pedestrian-friendly street frontages, alleys and auto courts, and common open space with trails.

![Image of 15 Dwelling Units Per Acre (Gross)]

Relatively new mixed-housing-type subdivision, also within the master-planned Issaquah Highlands development in Issaquah.

18 Dwelling Units Per Acre (Net)

Notable features: A combination of surface/garage parking and generous open space and recreational features (including children’s play area, sports court, vegetable gardens for residents, trails, common recreational building, and a protected natural area).
New apartment community in Renton.

27 Dwelling Units Per Acre (Net)

Notable features: Single and double-single family lots redeveloped with condominiums. Each building contains between three and seven units and has front-loaded parking at the street level beneath the dwelling units. All are built within a strict 30-foot height limit; hence, the flat roofs.

5th Avenue Condominiums in Kirkland.

34 Dwelling Units Per Acre (Net)
Notable features: An urban, street-oriented townhouse development integrating corner retail spaces, live-work spaces, internal auto courts with private garages, and common open space.

Lionsgate Townhouses in Redmond.

36 Dwelling Units Per Acre (Net)

Notable features: A cluster of single-family homes integrated into surrounding neighborhood with alley and internal auto-court access, private garages, a large cedar tree, and a manmade stream running through the site.
Detached single-family homes in The Boulders at Green Lake development in Seattle. (Johnston Architects)

44 Dwelling Units Per Acre (Net)

Notable features: New urban townhouses and live-work units served by underground parking and containing private patios and a centralized, shared courtyard space.
Live-work and regular townhouse units in Seattle’s Lower Queen Anne neighborhood. (Landscape plan courtesy of David Vandervort Architects)

59 Dwelling Units Per Acre (Net)

Notable features: The whole block site transitions from four-story buildings with ground level retail to townhomes that rise only one level above the street at the northwest corner of the site. While the L-shaped, mixed-use apartment building is over 100 dwelling units per net acre, the surface parking area and townhouse building bring the block’s average density down to 59 units per net acre.
162 Dwelling Units Per Acre (Net)

Notable features: A 6-story, mixed-use apartment building in the very urban, First Hill neighborhood.

205 Dwelling Units Per Acre (Net)

Notable features: This mixed-use project now under construction features 41 studio apartments averaging only 430 square feet. The trend in smaller units in urban areas results in a much higher density count.
than would be assumed in looking at this four-story building. It replaces two single-family homes and features only eight parking spaces but will be within walking distance of a future light rail station.

![Image](https://www.theurbanist.org/2017/05/04/visualizing-compatible-density/)

**STUDIO APARTMENTS OVER GROUND-LEVEL RETAIL IN SEATTLE’S ROOSEVELT NEIGHBORHOOD. (WEINSTEIN A+U)**

Conclusions: What Makes Density Compatible?

Some quick observations about the examples above and key elements that make them appear more or less livable or attractive.

**Good streetscape.** Since the most common perception of cities is from our view at street level, the quality of the streetscape in front of the buildings makes perhaps the biggest impact in humanizing developments and softening the hard edges of buildings. Street trees are present in all of the examples above, except the very first example in Ellensburg, and it’s notable that new streetscape standards for Ellensburg now require planting strips with trees! The mixed-use building photos above were all taken during the wintertime. Summertime photos from the same vantage point would certainly soften the edges of those buildings!

**Vehicular access elements.** Streetscapes dominated by views of garages tend to create more of a dehumanized setting. While they may not necessarily make a streetscape feel more dense, the garages certainly degrade the visual character. The Issaquah Highlands examples above are particularly successful in locating and designing garages and driveways in a manner that minimizes their visual impact on
Building design. There are a number of building features that can impact a person’s perception of the building.

- **Façade massing.** Large buildings featuring good articulation techniques that break down the perceived scale of the building and add visual interest will appear less dense than a boxy and poorly detailed building.

- **Façade materials & detailing.** Buildings with materials and detailing that add visual depth and interest to a view will also be perceived as less dense and more livable.

- **Variety.** While some consistency in built form can be good and help to establish a sense of place, monotonous designs (particularly those with poor streetscapes, façade massing, materials, and detailing) can degrade the visual character and make the area feel denser than it is.
Monotonous Setbacks and Building Forms. While some variety of color and porch roof forms are included, it still comes across as excessively monotonous.

The following planners provided assistance in this piece: Steve Butler and Byron Katsuyama (MRSC), Jeremy McMahan (Development Services Planning Manager, City of Kirkland), Chip Vincent and Clark Close (Long Range Planning Director/Senior Planner, City of Renton), Gary Lee (Senior Planner, City of Redmond), Lisa Rutzick (Design Review Program Manager, City of Seattle), Joming Lau (Urban Design, MAKERS), and Sean McCormick (Urban Designer, MAKERS).

This article is a cross-post that originally appeared on MRSC Insight Blog.

Bob Bengford, AICP, is a Partner with MAKERS architecture, planning and urban design firm. Bob’s community design work encompasses all transects, from urban downtowns and transit-oriented development to rural area planning. Since joining MAKERS 13 years ago, Bob’s specialty has been helping communities craft usable development regulations and design guidelines. The combination of growing up in a sprawling Orange County (CA) tract home subdivision, reviewing development plans against antiquated and inconsistent codes in rural Bonner County (ID), and working with a great mentor at MAKERS (John Owen) have helped Bob recognize the critical importance of good development regulations and design guidelines in shaping vital and healthy communities. As a resident of Bellevue, Bob has been active in various community planning issues. He’s also an active four-season bicycle commuter, hiker, gardener, and urban explorer.

We hope you loved this article. If so, please consider subscribing or donating. The Urbanist is a non-profit that depends on donations from

https://www.theurbanist.org/2017/05/04/visualizing-compatible-density/[10/25/2019 2:57:19 PM]
The Urbanist encourages dialogue on important urban issues through guest contributions. Over the years, we've had dozens of guest authors share their opinions and insights ranging from commentary on current events to community interviews and researched think pieces. If you would like to see
your name behind a byline on The Urbanist, feel free to reach out to our Editorial Team at editorial[at]theurbanist[dot]org.

 Rossb  May 11, 2017 at 9:08 am

Nice article. I think people assume that density and height go together, but often they don’t. Neighborhoods in Brooklyn with brownstone buildings are very densely populated, despite not being very tall. Likewise with row houses in San Francisco. In both cases you have very
little “waste” (no extra space between buildings, or huge streets) as well as multiple apartments per house. The result is a charming as well as densely populated city.

While Seattle doesn’t have anything quite like this, it is interesting to see how big houses taking up most of the lot along with liberal density rules can translate into fairly high density. For example, there are a couple census blocks in the U-District, between 50th and 55th. They have almost identical density — a bit over 25,000 people per square mile (high for Seattle). Some of this is due to the apartments that line both 15th and the Ave (University Way). But if it was just these apartments driving the density, then the block to the west would be much higher, as it includes half of 15th and all of the Ave (while the block to the east only includes half of 15th).

But that isn’t the case — density is about the same for each. The reason density is fairly high even though it is largely “nothing but houses” is because there are a lot more people in each house. Some of this is of course students sharing bathrooms and kitchens, but there are also a lot of houses that have been converted to apartments. These show up as “multi-plexes” on the zoning map (green blocks in a single family zone). https://jeffreylinn.carto.com/viz/681ff218-0a5d-11e6-8f50-0ea31932ec1d/embed_map. Since Seattle has plenty of neighborhoods like that, we could dramatically increase density without replacing a single house if we simply liberalized the density rules.

Chloe P. H. Lewis  May 15, 2017 at 1:45 pm

Some of the mansions in Seattle were built as boardinghouses — boardinghouses could be quite respectable and even fancy from, oh, the Civil War to at least WWI. Seattle made them illegal in the 1960s, IIRC.

( I was looking at the original building plans for my house and adjacent on the microfiche was a boardinghouse on Federal Avenue near Volunteer Park. The whole basement was a laundry — no clothes drier machines! — and there was a single huge kitchen and each of the seven bedrooms had a fixed sink but there were only two or three toilets and I think two bathtubs. This would be a
better model for comfortable density if it didn’t depend so much on ill-paid service jobs.)

Matt the Engineer  May 11, 2017 at 7:37 am

Great reference article. I’ll probably end up linking to this frequently – it’ll help density discussions.

Comments are closed.
From: Angela Dellaporta  
Sent: Sun 10/20/2019 4:40 PM  
To: North Ventura Coordinated Area Plan  
Subject: Some preparatory materials for next NVCAP meeting

Dear Working Group,

We have been working with city staff to include, as part of our next meeting, a discussion about housing density; you’ll be asked to share your thoughts and opinions about the density you feel would be most reasonable and advantageous for the NVCAP area.

To participate knowledgeably in this discussion, you will probably want to be able to visualize different densities. The following articles are full of illustrations to help you:

https://www.theurbanist.org/2017/05/04/visualizing-compatible-density/

https://siliconvalleyathome.org/quiz/can-guess-density-developments/

You also need to know that currently the Fry’s site is zoned RM-30 (30 units of housing per acre); Olive and Pepper are zoned R-1 (1 unit of housing per acre); and the rest of the NVCAP area is zoned for business, multi-family residences or manufacturing. If we want, we can recommend changing a current zone.

Here is a map of the area, with zoning:

https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/6418

And here is an explanation of what the zoning means:

https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/6513

Angela Dellaporta  
Gail Price
Hello,

I have one more density document that I would like to have shared with the group prior to our upcoming meeting. Could this be forwarded? Thanks so much


Kirsten Flynn