Restrictions put on redevelopment in city
San Diego Union - Sunday, December 9, 1984
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The era of uncontrolled redevelopment of San Diego's pre-World War II neighborhoods is coming to an end, according to city planners, with the City Council's adoption last week of a new master plan for Mid-City.

Under the 248-page plan for 13.25 square miles where more than 100,000 persons live, developers will no longer be able to demolish single-family homes and erect a dozen condominiums.

Commercial developers will have to install more landscaping and better signs. And for the first time, a financing plan and fee and tax schedule will guide the addition of parks, schools, sewer and water line modernization and other forms of public improvement.

"It's going to be the prototype for other city plans," said assistant planning director Michael J. Stepner.

Mid-City, bounded by Interstate 805, Mission Valley, La Mesa/San Diego State University area and State 94, encompasses eight neighborhoods -- Normal Heights, Kensington, Talmadge Park, El Cajon Boulevard-University Avenue Corridor, City Heights, Chollas Creek, Oak Park and Rolando.

Stepner said many of the standards and concepts for the Mid-City plan will be reused as new plans for Southeast San Diego, Uptown (Hillcrest, Mission Hills and Middletown) and North Park proceed to adoption next year. Ironically, some of the principles come from lessons learned in suburban development that has occurred in the last 20 years.

"We've always had design standards in newer areas enforced through the subdivision process and in some special districts," Stepner said. "Now we're saying that in Mid-City, Southeast and other communities that design is very important and we have to come up with ways of dealing with design issues -- not deciding whether a door should be blue or red but controlling bulk, signing, landscaping and site planning."

John Wilhoit, city planner for Mid-City, outlined key ordinance changes planned for implementation in the next 12 months to carry out the plan's intents and to reappear in the succeeding plan revisions for other areas:

- Residential development: Building densities of up to 75 dwelling units per acre (dua) will be restricted to no more than 30 dua -- a limit that effectively bans the recent practice of replacing single-family homes with more than five condominiums or apartments.

However, on lots greater than 10,000 square feet (the size of two standard lots), more density will be allowed if developers provide guest parking, reduce bulk and shadows on neighboring properties and locate car access off alleys rather than from the street.

On certain key corridors such as El Cajon Boulevard, densities of up to 100 dua will be
permitted (30 dua is the limit now) to take advantage of proximity to bus lines.

- Commercial development: The 22 miles of strip commercial zoning will be reduced in order to make the remaining commercial lots able to compete more successfully. Present "C" zone regulations will be scrapped in exchange for a more tailored approach that would make Adams Avenue, El Cajon Boulevard and University Avenue -- the key commercial strips -- more attractive.

- Fees: Last spring, the council imposed park fees on developers, similar to those required in new suburban developments. The San Diego Unified School District is considering imposing another set of fees to help finance improvements to the 20 schools in Mid-City, three-fourths of them 25 years old or older. In addition, developers wanting the density bonus will have to pay the fees involved in obtaining the required planned residential development permit.

"Growth management has worked too well," Stepner said, "because we have had greater infill (in older communities) than was ever projected. Because we had more people move in than was anticipated, there has been greater pressure on public facilities."

The growth management plan of the 1970s envisioned tight controls and high fees in suburbs as a way to encourage developers to build in the inner city. Stepner said this approach did not anticipate the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978, which severely restricted the property taxes available to finance improvements in the older areas, where developers were not required to pay for new facilities.

"We're putting all our general fund money into the (older) neighborhoods but there is less money available than was hoped for," Stepner said.

Caption: 1 MAP (F-19)

*Edition: 1.2
Section: REAL ESTATE
Page: F-17
Record Number: UTS0107934
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