



**OAKLAND  
BUSINESS  
IMPROVEMENT  
DISTRICT**

January 10, 2022

Christine Mondor, Chairwoman  
City of Pittsburgh Planning Commission  
c/o The Department of City Planning  
[planningcommission@pittsburghpa.gov](mailto:planningcommission@pittsburghpa.gov)

**RE: Council Bill 2021-1906 and DCP-MPZC-2021-01666 Zoning Code Text & Map Amendment  
OPR-E Oakland Crossings for the Central and South Oakland Neighborhoods**

Dear Chairwoman Mondor and members of Planning Commission,

I am writing on behalf of the Oakland Business Improvement District (“OBID”) in support of the proposed OPR-E Oakland Crossing Project Zoning Text and Map Amendment.

As you may know, OBID’s mission is to ensure Oakland’s place as Pennsylvania’s global center. This is accomplished by reframing the experience of the commercial, retail, office and residential environments, while dismantling oppression, embracing diversity, promoting diverse business and creating spaces for social, racial and economic justice. Recently designated by City Planning as a Registered Community Organization representing a larger footprint of the greater Oakland community, we recognize our role in evaluating development projects and participation in the neighborhood planning process.

More importantly, we have worked hard to have a diverse Board of Directors of 31 individuals, all with a direct connection to Oakland, but with varied backgrounds and experiences. OBID’s board has small business owners, Oakland residents, property owners large and small, institutional and governmental representatives, and people from the non-profit and civic communities. We have a strong governing process, and I am pleased to report that OBID’s support for this zoning text amendment has been fully ratified by our Board of Directors.

This OPR-E proposal honors the universally understood goals of the practice of zoning *to provide for the health, safety and welfare of the people as it relates to land use*. This is a long overdue change necessary to sustain and grow the health, welfare and the prosperity of a city that, starting decades ago, has successfully reinvented itself by creating new innovative industries dominated by the education and medical sectors. The proposed OPR-E Zoning considers the need for Pittsburgh to grow and to be a city that sustains lives, that sustains livelihoods and that sustains opportunities for future generations.

This proposed ordinance change will allow for mutually agreed upon community principles defining Oakland as a place for all people to call home, for all people looking to start and run a business, and for all people seeking employment opportunities to sustain their livelihoods and their family livelihoods. Oakland will also continue to thrive as the place we send our sick to heal and to expand their life on earth, where we send our children to grow and nurture their intellect and where we visit cultural centers, museums and houses of worship to feed our creative and spiritual needs.

*In recognition of these strong community goals, OBID supports the following:*

**1) Pittsburgh’s Zoning Text should accurately reflect the Oakland context.**

Given its land use as a commercial, residential, cultural, civic, employment and geographic hub of Pittsburgh, Oakland is both a local and a regional serving district and should be defined as a neighborhood as well as a central business district or a Downtown. This section of the city began this regional serving land use transformation over a century ago. For example, the University of Pittsburgh



moved to Oakland in 1908, Montefiore Hospital was founded in 1908 and built at the present site in 1929, the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Museum was founded in 1895 and Phipps Conservatory opened in Oakland in 1893 to name a few.

To meet the long-awaited needs of both a local and regional serving community, we support the establishment of an additional Oakland Public Realm Subdistrict, OPR-E. As stated in Pittsburgh's Zoning Code, "the intent of the Oakland Public Realm District (OPR) is to provide regulations for the development and growth of Oakland in an effort to preserve the mixed-use nature of the community while enhancing the sense of place of Oakland's public areas." The proposed OPR-E Subdistrict builds on the previously established Subdistricts to allow the level of density, mix of uses, and attention to the public realm that captures Oakland's full character.

**2) *Although the new Oakland Plan has not been enacted, we believe a robust and inclusive review process for Oakland, conducted by City Planning, has already occurred.***

For the purpose of evaluating the proposed OPR-E Zoning Code Text and Map amendment, we believe that a robust public engagement process reflecting - and in some cases exceeding- what is expected of a traditional Pittsburgh neighborhood plan process has concluded, and the results are reflected in draft strategies and land use proposals that have been developed by City Planning staff. This has been a 2+ year process involving community stakeholder input and a cumulative total of thousands of hours of time and expertise provided by a large and active stakeholder committee; I personally have spent 100+ hours as a Steering Committee member representing OBID.

The process also provided multiple methods for public input throughout this 2+ years process: each of the 50+ Steering Committee members were responsible for maintaining a communication and feedback loop with their stakeholders. Concurrent to this, City Planning staff developed comprehensive engagement through the EngagePgh website and through hosting multiple public meetings. OBID has been closely tracking the progress of the Oakland Plan. *We have met with the Oakland Crossings development team, studied their plans, and have concluded that the OPR-E sub-district is in substantial alignment with the Plan's general and place-based strategies as well as preliminary land use proposals that have been presented to the Plan's Steering Committee.*

**3) *A zoning review process for Oakland should follow the practice necessary for a neighborhood as well as for a Downtown center. Flexibility is necessary.***

A zoning review process established as a norm for a local serving community is not enough to guide the real estate development needs for a regional serving civic and employment center. Flexibility is key. We believe that Zoning Code Text and Map amendments for Oakland should capture a similar review process that is fitting to a Downtown center and a process that has historically been achieved here in Downtown Pittsburgh. The 1997 *Downtown Pittsburgh Plan* described itself as a "flexible, market-based framework for Downtown development..." The Plan's development strategy was built on "the straightforward observation that people attract people. A multiplicity of activities – working, residing, shopping, and recreating – reinforce that notion, creating a whole greater than the parts."

Furthermore, any plan provides a framework for development; it does not, itself, create development. To assume that a development proposal, aligned with much of the thrust of the Oakland Plan, must somehow wait until the Oakland Plan is completed and worked through the public approval process is simply not realistic and not fitting to the needs of one of Pittsburgh's largest employment centers.

In addition to the development proposal's close alignment with key aspects of the Oakland Plan and the need for flexibility as is expected of a Downtown center, there are a series of issues that point to approving the zoning and map change to allow development, including:

- Market momentum -- there is tremendous interest in Oakland now for a full-service grocery store and “walk-to-work” housing options;
- Strategic stakeholders and City leadership are supportive of the community goals as embodied in the development; and
- There is potential for unprecedented large Federal infrastructure funds that will be available and will only go to shovel-ready projects.

**4) *Pittsburgh Zoning should reflect the New Normal economic implications of the Pandemic.***

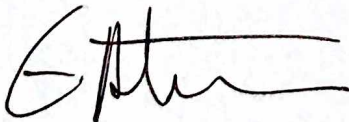
We believe that Zoning Law processes should not be confined to limiting and linear approaches. Zoning processes should provide flexibility for inevitable changes and for inevitable circumstances. The once in a century pandemic experienced in the last two years is one such circumstance and we must act now to keep up with these historic transformations. These last few years not only saw unprecedented disruptions to our lives, but we also experienced the following unprecedented responses from Government to mitigate the pandemic impact and that will continue to have local implications:

- Historically low interest rates which brought about a housing boom yet also increased demand for housing alternatives;
- Historically large government infusion: over \$4.3 trillion in federal aid provided which includes the infrastructure funds referenced above; and
- US spending in health reached a record high with overall health spending reaching its largest share of the U.S. economy ever at 19.7% which will continue to support the strength of Oakland’s medical community.

And lastly, at the outset of the Mayor Ed Gainey administration, we believe enacting this proposed legislation will jump start his administration’s goals for Pittsburgh, shared by the Oakland community, to make Pittsburgh a city where economic opportunity is abundant for everyone, a city where affordability isn’t a luxury, and a city that is prepared to lead into the future.

Why wait. Let us begin today to mutually work to reach these ambitious goals.

Sincerely,



Georgia Petropoulos  
Chief Executive Officer

CC: Kelly McBroom, Chairperson, OBID Board of Directors