



Oakland Measure DD Community Coalition

To: Oakland Planning Commission members
From: Measure DD Community Coalition
RE: Comments on the Downtown Oakland Specific Plan and draft EIR
Date: November 5, 2019

The [Measure DD Community Coalition](#), composed of representatives of local advocacy and interest groups, and individual citizens, was formed in 2003 to advise the City on the use of the funds from 2002's Measure DD Bond Measure. These bond funds have made significant, popular improvements to the parklands at Lake Merritt and along the Lake Merritt Channel. The parklands, which form the entire eastern border of the Downtown Oakland Specific Plan (DOSP), are essential to meeting the park needs of the plan's projected residential population. However, the plan gives scant attention to these parklands. Several of the plan's projects and policies will have an adverse impact on the future life of various improvements funded by Measure DD. Following are our chief concerns about the plan's impact on Lake Merritt and Channel parkland.

Identify realistic financing dedicated to the maintenance and upkeep of the Lake Merritt parklands

Our primary issue is with the plan's failure to ensure that sufficient maintenance and upkeep of the Lake Merritt parklands will be provided now and into the future. The plan proposals and related mitigations don't address the predictable increase in their use by the projected increase in population of more than 50,000 residents. The draft EIR acknowledges this problem: "The amount of acreage of parks in downtown is small in comparison to other parts of the city, and with the projected increase in population, the existing overused parks will become increasingly more overused" (p. 623). On-going maintenance of the City's parks and open spaces remains a chronic budget problem. For that reason alone the plan must propose a realistic financing method that will provide a steady, dedicated stream of revenue sufficient for parks maintenance needs and permanent upkeep. Suggesting an update in the LLAD (CH-1.6, p.182, draft EIR p.622), which has already failed more than once, cannot be considered realistic in addressing this need.

Provide zoning provisions to meet a substantial goal of housing that relieves homeless encampments in Lake Merritt parklands and along the Lake Merritt Channel

The plan must offer effective solutions that will eliminate encampments along Lake Merritt's shoreline and the Channel by providing housing and services for the campers. The maintenance of this parkland is in part severely challenged by homeless individuals resorting to camping there. One of the plan's measures of success is "the number of people moving from homelessness to transitional and permanent housing increases..." (p. 95). This aspirational statement is not

backed up by zoning provisions and strategies to accomplish it. There should be an additional goal to reduce the number of encampments. The plan's current statement won't make a dent. The plan should provide for a truly significant number of units of affordable housing at the deepest levels of subsidy to begin to address the increasing number and size of encampments. The plan calls for up-zoning for residential development. This is a mistake that should be corrected. Increased density is acceptable under a two-tier zoning approach that allows greater heights/more dwelling units in exchange for significant community benefits such as affordable housing. It's disappointing that the Incentives Study commissioned by the City will not be available until after the period for making comments on the plan and draft EIR is closed.

Ensure that development along the Channel respects its ecology and is required to provide continuous public access

The plan makes scant mention of the Channel. The safety and protection of the Channel ecology, and its protection from pollution, are essential. The plan must ensure that development on either side of the Channel on Laney, Peralta, and Victory Court parcels takes this into account. The proposed 275' height limits should be re-examined and re-mapped where buildings might line the Channel (fig. LU 10a, p.217). The plan must ensure everyday access to the water by residents and visitors alike on paths through public open space on either side of the Channel. Development along the Channel shore must not be allowed to overwhelm, detract or impede public access. The plan should call for appropriate plantings along the edge to support wildlife and the marine ecosystem, and reduce polluting runoff.

Retain the existing height limits of buildings facing the lake to avoid shadows on parkland

The Land Use Intensity designations of the Lakeside and Lake Merritt Office District neighborhoods (fig. LU-10a, p.217) were subjected to intense scrutiny by the Planning Department and City Council during the 2006-2009 rezoning of this area. The Council specifically voted to reduce proposed height limits of 65'/85' to 55' for the residential community facing Lake Merritt between 14th and 17th Streets and from Lakeside Drive to both sides of Alice Street. The plan must retain the existing land use intensity and height limits so as not to obstruct views from and of the Lake. New housing, office buildings, and parking, especially in the Lakeside neighborhood, should not overshadow the lake, the surrounding parkland and the recently improved Snow Park. In addition to advocating for keeping the existing height limits, we support the mitigation proposal to add a shadow study to the Standard Conditions of Approval for a project that is "at or adjacent to a public or quasi-public park" (AES-1, draft EIR, pgs. 398- 399).

Integrate parks into a seamless web

The minimal attention accorded parks is a striking failure of the plan. A small step in the right direction would be for the plan to call for knitting together all the existing parks and proposals for their improvements into a broader vision: the Green Loop, West Oakland Walk, Estuary Park, Jack London's waterfront, the Bay Trail, the Lake Merritt to Bay Trail Bike-Ped Bridge, and the paths around Lake Merritt and along the Channel. These elements of public infrastructure offer ample places for making the city more engaging to all; integrating them into a seamless web would greatly increase their value.