

Residential Land Use and Housing Element

Ocean Beach is composed of a wide variety of residential units including small beach cottages, single family homes, duplexes, garden apartments, bungalow courts and larger multi-family structures, including a number of condominiums. In recent years, the majority of newly constructed housing units have been in multiple family structures. In the late 1960's, the number of multi-family units began to outnumber the single family units.

Existing lot sizes vary throughout the community. The two most typical sizes are 25' x 140' and 25' x 100'. In the majority of cases two lots have been combined to provide a 50' frontage. Several blocks in the northern area contain lots of various different sizes. Most lots have rear access to an alley.

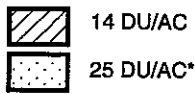
Existing residential zoning is R-4 west of Sunset Cliffs Boulevard and R-1 and R-2 to the east. Recent projects in the R-4 zone have averaged 50 - 60 dwelling units per acre. Development controls render it extremely difficult to exceed this density figure even though existing zoning allows a much higher density.

With the exception of a few older units, there is very little residential development in poor condition. Those properties that are dilapidated are scattered throughout Ocean Beach with a somewhat higher percentage in the northern area.

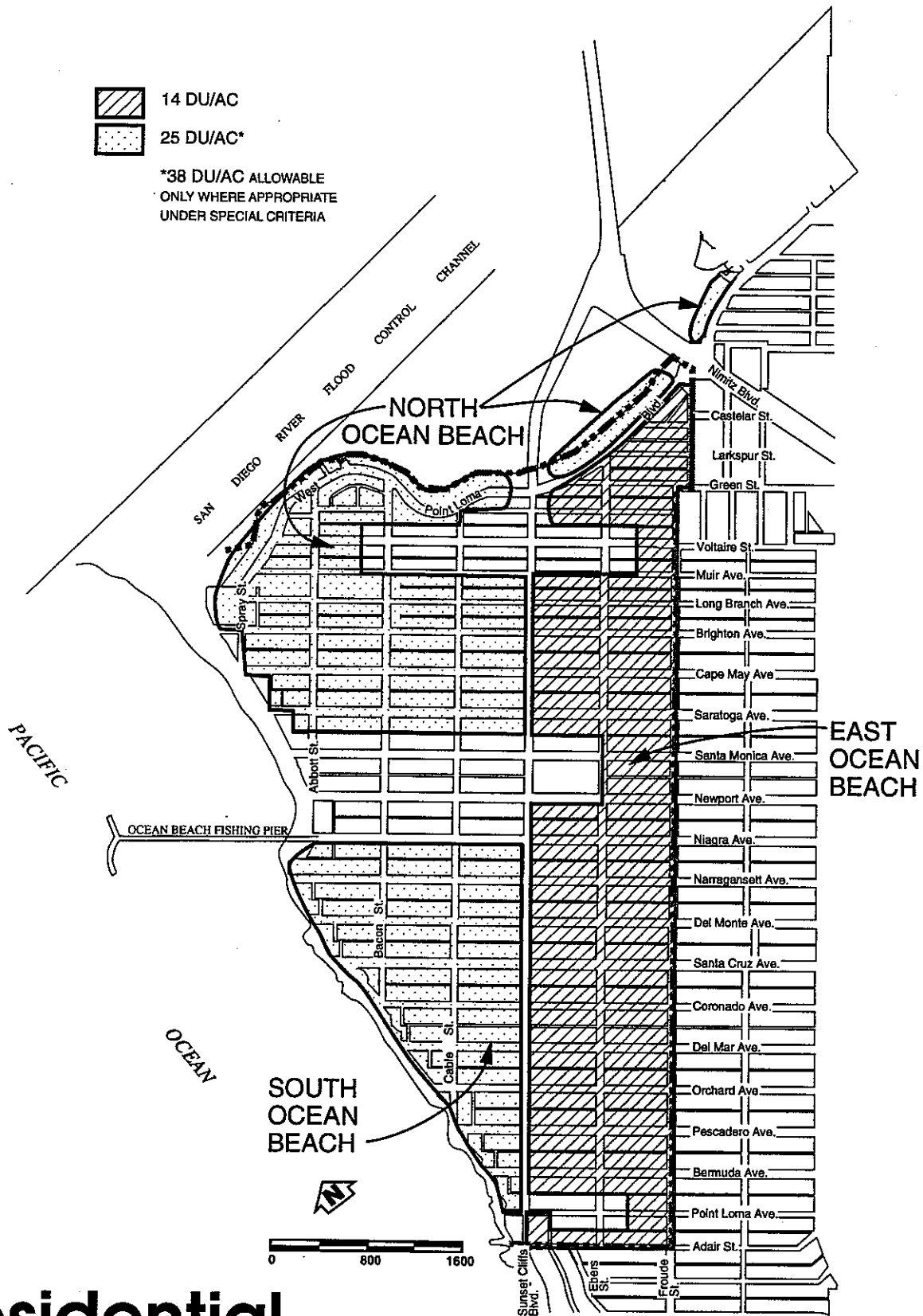
Recent construction trends indicate that new development consists of luxury rental units and condominiums brought about by high land value, construction costs and market demands for property near the coast. The rate at which new construction is occurring, however, has slowed due to several external forces. The City of San Diego, for example, has imposed stricter parking requirements and development regulations in the last several years. Also, two environmentally oriented initiatives have been approved by the voters. One, the Coastal Zone Conservation Act of 1972, is intended to insure the conservation of resources and determine the suitability and extent of all development proposals within 1,000 yards of the coastline. The second is a 30' height limit, also established in 1972. Both of these measures, in their own way, tend to restrict residential development. The combination of all of these factors do not preclude development, but the unit cost does increase as more restrictions and amenities are required. This is the trade-off that results in attempting to improve the quality of development.

High housing prices are having a severe impact upon many people living in Ocean Beach. Many lower income people who live in the community are unable to meet the increasing costs. As taxes increase, these people are forced to find less expensive places to live. New units are usually





*38 DU/AC ALLOWABLE
ONLY WHERE APPROPRIATE
UNDER SPECIAL CRITERIA



residential recommendations

way out of their price range and are relatively small, precluding families with children. The continuation of this latter trend could result in a continued decrease in the number of young children in the community.

Redevelopment in Ocean Beach, because of the lack of vacant land, necessarily involves the removal of existing housing units and their replacement with new ones. The old structures are the ones that provide the only lower cost housing in the community. Many of them are worthy of preservation but are removed in order to increase the economic return on a piece of property. Many of these buildings are being held for speculative purposes. When this becomes the case the owner usually neglects the maintenance, causing them to deteriorate. If such structures were adequately maintained, they could continue to provide housing for lower income people while aiding in the preservation of some of the character of Ocean Beach.

Goals

- o Maintain the existing residential character of Ocean Beach as exemplified by a mixture of small scale residential building types and styles.
- o Promote the continuation of an economically balanced housing market, providing for all age groups and family types.
- o Enhance the opportunity for racial and ethnic minorities to live in the community.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

New residential construction in Ocean Beach should be at a scale that is compatible with the present small lot development pattern. This suggests the development of garden-type apartments absent from excessive height and bulk. While the height of recent construction has been somewhat in keeping with established character, the R-4 zone has permitted excessively bulky buildings that tend to overshadow their neighbors.

Because of special conditions existing in Ocean Beach, regular zoning falls short of providing necessary guidelines for future development. Density measures are not tailored to the lots sizes in Ocean Beach, for example. The city-wide parking requirement is also too low. Consequently, special development regulations should be created for use in this area. These special regulations could be either in the form of a Planned District or in the form of tailored zones. The Planned District concept is the best means of implementing the Plan and should be used in Ocean Beach. Should the City choose to revise city-wide regulations to meet the need of individual neighborhoods in the near future, it is possible that special development regulations for Ocean Beach could be included

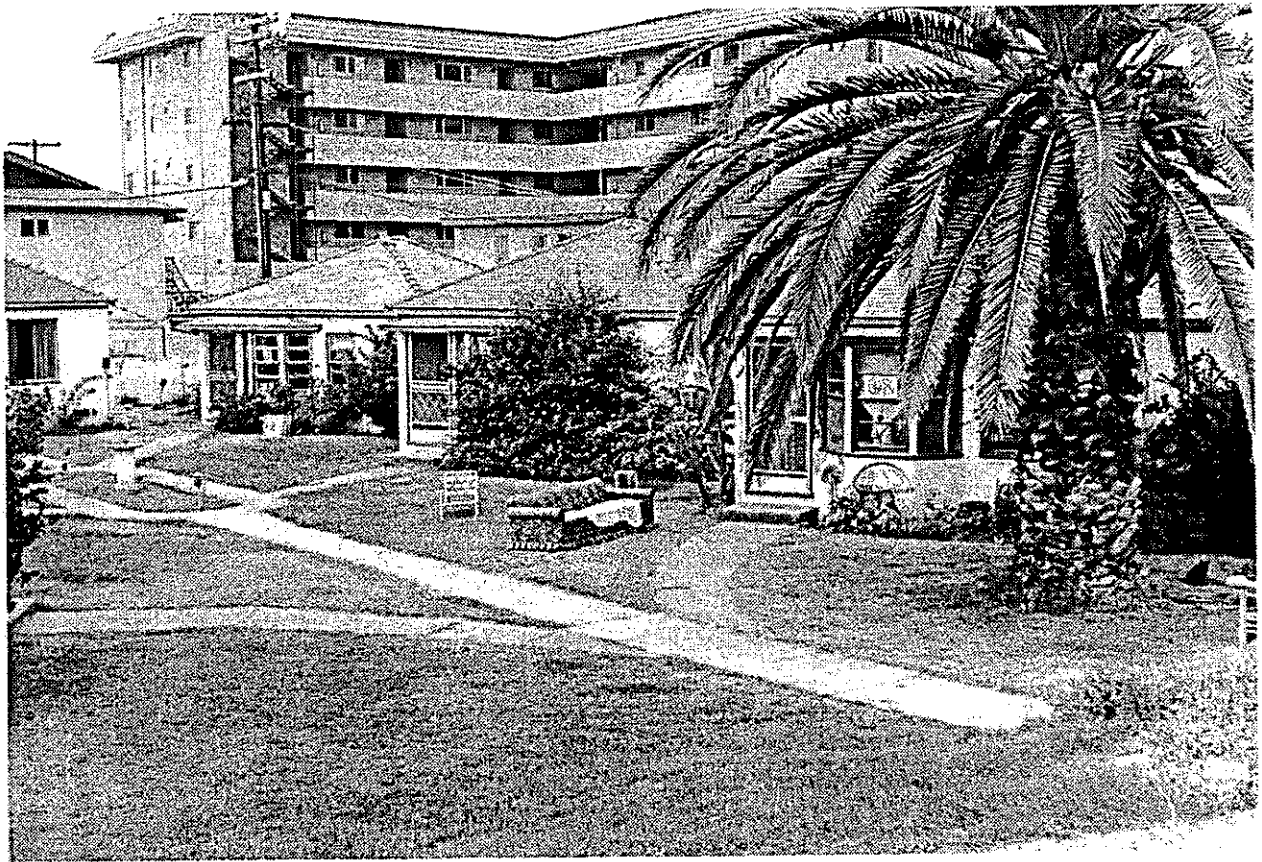
in such a revision. Otherwise, the necessity exists for these regulations to be written immediately upon the adoption of the Precise Plan. The following general guidelines should be followed in the preparation of any new regulations for Ocean Beach.

Density

For purposes of examining density patterns Ocean Beach can be divided into three subareas; East OB (east of Sunset Cliffs Boulevard), North OB (north of the Newport Center), and South OB (south of Newport Center). East OB is currently developed to less than 15 dwelling units per acre, while North and South Ocean Beach approach 30 dwelling units per acre. East OB is an established area of single family homes and duplexes. Because of its stability, the density should remain basically unchanged. North and South OB are presently experiencing redevelopment because of the high density zoning that has existed there for so many years. Although development has slowed recently, these areas reflect the appearance of neighborhoods in transition from one development style to another. In order to maintain some of the flavor of the past, new development should be at a scale compatible with more established residences in these areas. This has not been the case with development over recent years which has tended to simply maximize the amount of structure allowable on a lot. Future regulations, especially density, must encourage development more compatible with the established community.

There are three basic densities that relate well to the typical lot sizes in North and South Ocean Beach. None of these, unfortunately, reflect existing density controls in the present zoning ordinance. These densities are 25, 38, and 54 dwelling units per acre. These densities are based on the allocation of one, two, and three units on a typical 25 x 100 square foot lot and two, three, and four units on a typical 25 x 140 square foot lot. These, then, are the basic building blocks for any density proposals for Ocean Beach. Any other figures depart from the building block theory.

In order to permit reasonable development, and to preclude overdevelopment, the 25 and 54 unit per acre figures are considered to be the extremes in establishing densities. While all three of these densities are workable, it is proposed that the maximum density allocated at this time to any portion of Ocean Beach should be 25 units per acre. The 38 units per acre could be applied under certain circumstances, such as on larger parcels of land located on major streets, and according to special criteria. This criteria should include, but would not be limited to, the provision of low and moderate income housing, processing by a PRD permit, open space requirements that would exceed those normally required, design that would mitigate problems of size, bulk and scale, and traffic flow constraints. A density of 54 units per acre is not recommended for use at this time because it could result in an extreme increase in the population and could also substantially alter the character of the community. Such a



change might not only diminish the desirability of Ocean Beach as a place to live but would result in a population increase beyond that which could be accommodated by the circulation system, a system that is currently taxed beyond its means. Because north and south OB are well defined enclaves, the overall density allocated to each should be consistent throughout. Breaking either into subareas for purposes of allocating density results in arbitrary decision making because there is no logical basis for such a division.

Building Bulk

In order to control the relationship of a building to its site, regulations beyond density are necessary. The size of yards, amount of coverage, and total floor area all contribute to the overall appearance of the structure on the lot. The area of front yards should consist of 10% of the parcel area while maintaining a minimum setback of 10' in all cases. Structures may be located as close as 10' to the front property line even where a greater setback is required provided that the average setback for the particular lot is maintained. To average this out, some of the structure would have to be setback behind the required setback line. Interior side yards should be at least 3', but should be at least 4' adjacent to a structure over 20' in height. Where lots are over 40' in width the side yard should be at least 4'. Side yards of 0' are acceptable provided the opposite side yard in these cases is doubled from the normal requirement if all affected property owners are in agreement. Rear yards should be minimum of 10' except where they are adjacent to alleys in which case they could be 3'. The only exception should be the ground floor where parking is involved. A turning radius of 21' is considered a minimum for automobiles. Consequently, first floor setback should always allow 21' from the property line at the opposite side of the alley. A maximum of 50% lot coverage, excluding open parking areas, is necessary in all cases to insure useable open space on a lot. In cases of larger lots, coverage could be reduced to insure greater open space on a lot in order to prevent excessive bulk.

Floor area ratio plays the most important role in regulating the bulk of a structure. This regulates the amount of gross floor area permitted based on the size of the lot. A floor area ratio (FAR) has been assigned to each of the three densities selected. In each case, the ratio is large enough to permit the development of reasonably sized units while maintaining enough control on bulk to insure that structures are not out of scale with existing Ocean Beach dwellings. For the 25 du/ac density a FAR of .7 is proposed. For 38 du/ac 1.0 is proposed, and for 54 du/ac a maximum of 1.3 is proposed. All of these limitations that have been suggested to regulate bulk should be viewed as suggestions only. Refinement upon the creation of special regulations for Ocean Beach may warrant minor adjustments. Also, consideration should be given to the provision of increases or decreases in floor area ratio as positive and negative incentives for development where specific goals can be realized through such a process.

Height

All development at the densities proposed in this Plan is possible in structures of three stories or less. While arbitrary height limits do not necessarily lead to the best developments, there is obviously overwhelming community-wide support for such a limitation based on the results of the 30' height limit initiative passed by the voters in November, 1972. Therefore, while there are instances where taller buildings could logically be developed in Ocean Beach (on larger parcels of land with reduced coverage and a large amount of open space, for example), it is not recommended that buildings taller than three stories be permitted outright. Such structures, like higher density projects, should be evaluated on a case by case basis and possibly be permitted if a determination can be made that no negative impact exists. Because such decisions may be subjective, detailed criteria for any such exceptions should be written as part of special development regulations.

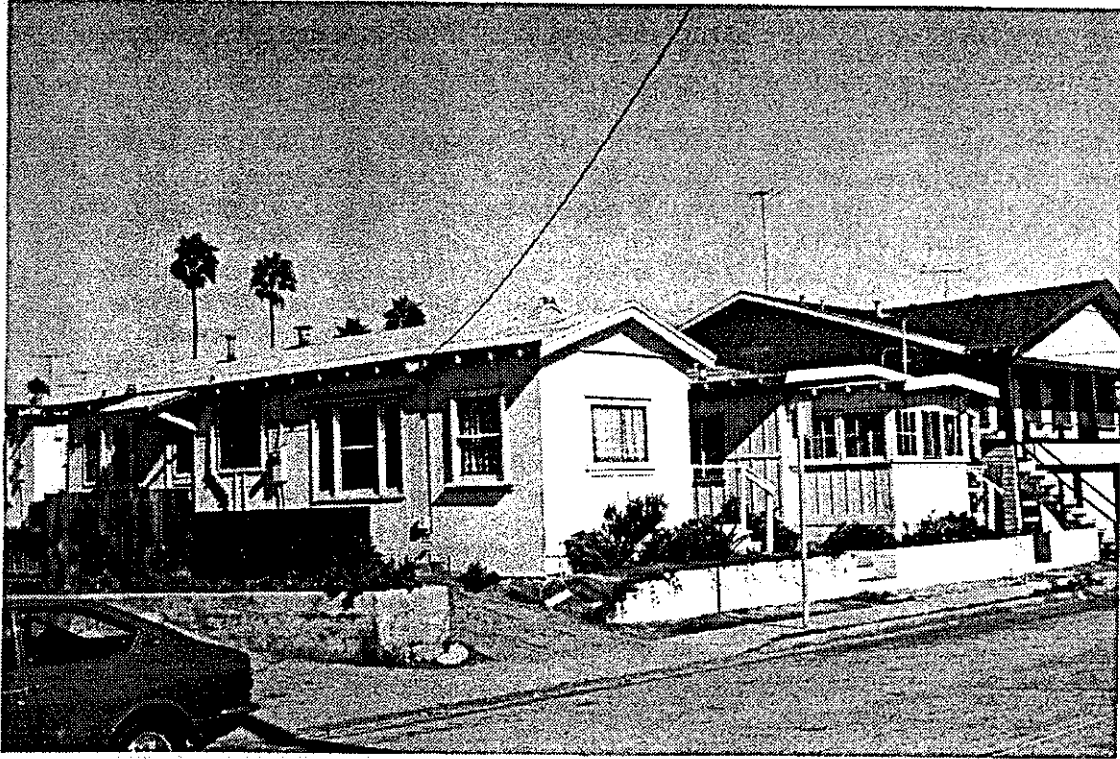
The proposed height limit for a density of 25 du/ac is 24' and two stories, and for 38 and 54 du/ac - 35' and three stories. Under normal circumstances there would be no need to exceed this limitation in order to achieve maximum development on a lot. The extra footage (24' vs. 20' and 35' vs. 30') is suggested in order to allow flexibility in the development of roof lines. The use of 20' and 30' will result in a continuation of flat-roofed, monotonous structures. The limitation by number of stories prevents extra levels from being squeezed into the more generous height limitations. Any proposal in excess of 30', of course, is subject to the eventual disposition of the present area-wide 30' limit.

Parking

Because of the lack of adequate off-street parking requirements at present, and because of the high number of automobiles generated per unit in Ocean Beach, it is recommended that a requirement of two off-street spaces per unit be required for all new development. Parking should not be permitted in the required front yard. In order to ease the burden of requiring increased parking, it is proposed that tandem parking be permitted for all residential development provided that at least one space per unit is accessible to an alley, and further provided that tandem parking spaces be accessible only from the rear of the lot. This insures that conflicts with passing traffic do not occur as residents shift cars around. It further insures that automobiles will, for the most part, be confined to the rear of the property, out of sight from the front.

Landscaping

At least 20% of the total lot should be landscaped, including all of the required front yard, except that portion devoted to driveways. Walks and decks may be considered as landscaping. Generally, however, landscaping refers to planting material and natural ground cover.



SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The Housing Element of the San Diego General Plan (A Decent Home for Every San Diegan) points out the serious housing deficiencies, both quantitative and qualitative which exist in a number of San Diego's older neighborhoods and communities. Among those problems are the lack of housing to serve the low income population, and the lack of housing needed to meet the special needs for such groups as students, military personnel, large families, and senior citizens.

City-wide there is a lack of diversity in the price range of types of housing available in certain communities. Further, an ever increasing portion of the existing housing stock is becoming qualitatively deficient because of age, lack of proper maintenance, and functional obsolescence. Those areas characterized by a high percentage of transiency and absentee ownership such as Ocean Beach also exhibit a significantly lower level of property maintenance, improvement, or redevelopment. Unfortunately, prevailing tax laws discourage rehabilitation, and encourage the retention of old, substandard structures. Owners are reluctant to rehabilitate because the improvement results in a tax increase.

Balanced Community

There are two basic needs in terms of housing that must be fulfilled in Ocean Beach. One is to continue the balance where it presently exists. The second is to promote a balance where it does not exist by redirecting development trends. The Housing Element of the General Plan (A Decent Home for Every San Diegan) suggests that every community in San Diego should be economically and ethnically balanced. Council Policy 600-19 requires that the Council do whatever is reasonably and practically possible in all of San Diego's developed Communities to effect the development of economic and racial balance.

The high value of land in Ocean Beach makes the task of maintaining an economic balance, and creating a balance in ways that it does not now exist, a difficult one. If such a task is not accomplished, however, the result will be the continued development of luxury apartments and condominiums, many of which will be consuming lower cost housing in their paths.

In order to provide for a balance of life styles, the basic need is to provide housing in Ocean Beach for low and moderate income families, and for families with small children. There is a need to continue to insure the availability of housing for students, as well as luxury units for those who can afford them. Provision should also be made for the many senior citizens who have lived in Ocean Beach for years who are now fighting ever increasing taxes and dwindling real incomes.

The most reasonable means of providing for these needs is through the rehabilitation of existing housing units. Many units which are structurally sound could be saved from eventual demolition given some basic code improvements. Remodeling efforts in many cases could be used to expand the size of small units in order to make them attractive to larger families. Both public and private efforts will be necessary in order to encourage rehabilitation. While subsidies may presently be unrealistic, there are other techniques ranging from educational efforts to the actual provision of incentives for certain endeavors. The creation of a community association for the purpose of encouraging rehabilitation of deteriorating structures is an example of a private effort that could be initiated.

The preceding arguments have dealt with the problem of economic balance. There is also a condition of racial and ethnic imbalance in Ocean Beach at present. Less than one percent of the residents of the community are black. About five percent reflect a Mexican-American heritage. Both of these percentages are far below City-wide averages. This imbalance is probably a product of the economic imbalance discussed earlier. Whatever the reason might be, however, the future should include more use of affirmative marketing programs (whereby positive action is taken to insure that minorities have a full opportunity to live in a community). This concept is suggested by Council Policy 600-19, in order to insure the opportunity for a reasonable balance of the population in terms of racial and ethnic background.

Taxation

The process of land development inevitably involves taxing and assessment practices, which have a substantial impact on development patterns. Efforts to encourage rehabilitation, for example, could be stimulated by providing incentives through the use of tax breaks for certain rehabilitation efforts. The re-evaluation of all taxation and assessment practices is another necessary step that must be taken in order to clarify the underlying reasons why redevelopment practices assume the form that they do. This could be a monumental undertaking. All practices of the tax assessor are fixed by state law. Generally speaking, assessment practices must be carried out equally for all parts of the County.

The free interplay of the real estate market in Ocean Beach has a tremendous impact upon the nature of development. Private land use decisions are seldom based upon community goals but rather upon maximizing the individual's return on a given piece of property. The result of this kind of motivation takes the form of either intense development or pure speculation. In speculating, property is held with the hope that increases in value will result in a considerable profit on the original investment when it is eventually sold. If the property contains minor improvements, they may be left to deteriorate because the eventual redevelopment of the property would involve their removal anyway. The value of property is in the land, not the improvements. Any minor improvement to the

property, then, would not be recovered financially when the property exchanged hands. In Ocean Beach, this results in a large number of inexpensive residential dwelling units that will continue in use until the cost of owning the property (taxes, maintenance, mortgage) becomes greater than the income, at which time it will either be renovated or redeveloped in order to increase the economic return. There is some question as to whether taxation and assessments should be permitted, in all cases, to continue to rise in line with market activity. These practices are about the only control available upon the free market. An undesirable result of increasing taxes and assessment is that property serving a need in its present use is sometimes forced into development or redevelopment. An example of this might be the need for lower cost housing in the case of developed property. These needs are usually not realized because these types of uses provide an insufficient return on the land. In other cases, an owner desiring to keep property simply to live on may be forced to sell because of rising taxes. Because of these types of situations, it is necessary to study the feasibility of using taxes and assessments to influence land use decisions in line with adopted community goals.

Ocean Beach is affected continuously by the types of economic pressures described above. Decisions on the nature and timing of development activity are predicated on market conditions. Rarely can a decision be made based simply upon whatever is "best" for the community. It is possible, however, to use the process of taxation to change development patterns, at least to a minor extent. This possibility needs to be investigated fully.

Summary of Plan Recommendation

- o That new residential construction be in the form of garden-type units, absent from excessive height and bulk and compatible in design with the existing community.
- o That special development regulations, in the form of a Planned District, be created to replace existing zoning.
- o That the density of East Ocean Beach remain at less than 15 dwelling units per acre.
- o That special development regulations include density criteria based on 1 unit for every 1,750, 1,150, and 800 square feet of lot area (25, 38, and 54 dwelling units/acre, respectively).
- o That the highest density established on an area-wide basis be 25 dwelling units per acre.
- o That special criteria be established to limit the allocation of any 38 dwelling unit per acre density to appropriate locations.

- o That yards and coverage be adequate to insure provision of light and air to surrounding properties, and that those requirements be more stringent where necessary for buildings over two stories in height and for lots greater than 40' in width.
- o That floor area ratios of about .7 for a 25 du/ac density, 1.0 for a 38 du/ac density, and 1.3 for a 54 du/ac density be developed, and that consideration be given to increasing or decreasing them for purposes of providing positive or negative incentives for development, based upon detailed criteria.
- o That a basic height limit of 2 stories and 24' be established for the 25 du/ac densities and 3 stories and 35' for the 38 and 54 du/ac densities, subject to exception under certain conditions based on detailed criteria.
- o That two off-street parking spaces be provided for every residential unit and that tandem parking be permitted provided that access is from the rear of the lot and provided that at least one space per unit opens on to an alley.
- o That at least 20% of lots be landscaped, including all of the required front yard.
- o That lower income housing be encouraged to be maintained in Ocean Beach, especially through the minor rehabilitation of existing sub-standard units.
- o That an affirmative action program be established in order to inform persons of the choices of existing housing and to insure that builders and developers of housing are aware of all available housing programs.
- o That current assessment practices be evaluated in order to determine their impact upon the community with respect to goals of the Precise Plan.
- o That taxation programs be evaluated for purposes of providing tax relief and encouraging development compatible with the goals of the Precise Plan.