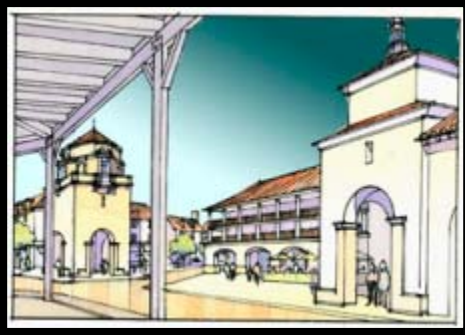


Meriam Park, Chico, CA



A Day by Day Summary of the Seven Day Neighborhood Planning Charrette in Chico, CA – Dec. 3 - 9, 2003

Jeff Schommer
Minneapolis, MN
December 2003

Wednesday, December 3, 2003

The team met at the studio at 8:30 am. Informal discussions and meet and greet occurred, as well as more technical set-up and testing. At 10:00, the team grouped up around the pin-up wall for an introduction to the City of Chico and the planning area given by Tom DiGiovanni of Heritage Partners and John Anderson of New Urban Builders.



At 11:30 the team was lead by John on a walking tour of downtown Chico, the University area and the Esplanade. The team returned to the studio for lunch at about 12:30 and continued their tour, this time of the larger Chico area, Doe Mill neighborhood and the Enloe planning site.

The team returned at 4:00 pm to begin preparations for the evening Opening Presentation and to start on the designs. After dinner, the Opening Presentation began. Tom DiGiovanni started the presentation by welcoming the 60 citizens in attendance. John Anderson then took over, beginning with a description of what a charrette is, how the process works, and what types of end-products are expected. John then discussed the Transect and introduced the team.



Next, Dan Parolek from Opticos Design explained how the daily plan reviews will be work and where the plans will be pinned up for public viewing. Patrick Siegman then discussed street patterns and the ways in which streets can be constructed in order to make them comfortable and safe.

The presentation ended with a question and answer period and informal discussions.

Thursday, December 4, 2003

The team met at 8:30 around the Plan Review pin-up wall to discuss the initial ideas that they had come up with the previous day. Tom DiGiovanni began with a bit more contextual discussion which led into a more in depth conversation about the meadow foam protection area at the north end of the site.



Next, Leon Krier discussed the preliminary site plans that he had drawn up. He began by pressing the need to look at the site in a larger regional context, identifying the site as a central piece of a southeast quadrant of the City of Chico. He discussed how a ribbon of undevelopable reserve around the east side of town would help to focus future development within this southeast quadrant and give it a discernable edge. Thinking of this as a long term diagrammatical program

would give the designers a tool for communication amongst themselves as well as with citizens, civic groups and government officials.

Then, thinking within this regional context, the designers could think more clearly about connections to the site and the patterns that make sense within the site. As 20th street currently dead ends just beyond the Doe Mill development, and on city land use plans for the future, main access from the east was identified to come from 32, Skyway, and 99.

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From that initial discussion of access, Patrick Siegman talked about options for a “main” street in the new neighborhood. He asked the designers to think about two models for moving heavy traffic in the area: one being a single, wide boulevard type, the other a single main street with one or two parallel streets that would carry main street overflow.

The discussion then moved to civic spaces and a church. Peter Musty presented the idea of a “Civic Reserve”, carving out a block pattern that would remain as civic uses, but is flexible as to what the exact use would be, as it has not currently been decided. The basic structure discussed was a 2 acre church site with 3 additional 2 acre parcels in reserve. These parcels would be placed in a prominent location on a view corridor.



Seth Harry then talked about the commercial Village Center component. Seth gave two options for the orientation of the commercial: either as a neighborhood focal point or as a neighborhood scaled extension of the current regional commercial center on 20th street.

With these ideas in mind, the design team broke up into smaller workgroups to continue with their plans for the 5:30 pm Plan Review.

About 25 citizens attended the Plan Review to learn about and react to the initial plan ideas. Darin Dinsmore lead off with a presentation about the creek and topographical and vegetative features of the creek. Other than a few small, separate stands of oak, willow and sycamore, the creek is relatively free of vegetation. Most of that which exists is of a quality to be preserved, and the lack of vegetation along most of the creek leaves many opportunities for enhancement and new plantings. There is some riparian habitat along the creek. The north side of the creek has a rather abrupt edge in comparison to the south side and its gentle elevation change.

Bill Allison then gave a brief introduction to building types that will occur in the development. Bill stated that there are two factors that dictate building types: a market study and local precedent studies.

Peter Musty then talked about the Civic reserve and the initial block schemes that were developed. Peter showed how he used the examples of successful precedents from around the world, but that those precedents can easily become “essentially Chico”. Church precedents were taken from Chico.

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Leon Krier then discussed the “big picture”, the city wide framework for the future, by introducing an east side corridor reserve (possibly for a highway 99 bypass). This reserve would not be built upon until the corridor was needed, but would be reserved as a definite edge of development. With this outer edge, Chico creek and highway 99 bisecting the city, the city is organically arranged in four quadrants. Leon also introduced the plan to have a continuous avenue running through the development site.

After the Plan Review, the design team ate dinner and chatted one on one with some of the citizens who stuck around. After dinner, the design team met to discuss the retail plan and appropriate places for a creek crossing.

Earlier in the day, Seth Harry and Chris Cole spoke a local retail leasing agent about Chico’s commercial needs. This person suggested that there is a regional scale need for a distinguished, food based commercial program made up of local and independent retailers. This commercial area need not be continuous with the current commercial center along 20th St. Seth also relayed to the team that this type of commercial would benefit from a connection to the creek. Funneling traffic into the site would be a key to success, with a narrowing of the street with street parking and a boulevard to slow traffic and increase pedestrian comfort. It was also said that with this type of commercial, the town center could be developed first, in opposition to the normalcy of having to wait for a critical mass of residential. Rents would probably be in the low \$20 per square foot, with simple, but well executed buildings.

A bridge crossing Little Chico Creek is necessary on the development site. The city envisioned, a crossing at Notre Dame Avenue, but John and Tom would like to see the crossing more central to the development. Darin identified three sites which are better than a Notre Dame Ave. crossing: nearly mid site, on top of the sewer pipe, and just to the east of the sewer pipe.

The design team then broke up into the work groups that were designated by Opticos before the charrette to begin planning for the next round of review.

Friday, December 5, 2003

The studio filled with designers diagramming neighborhood schemes at 8:30. At 10:30 the team met for an internal design review. Five neighborhood schemes, drawn by five teams, and a retail scheme were presented.

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The first scheme showed a high street running through the center of the site and connecting with Bruce beyond the site at a curve on an adjacent site to the north. The scheme showed commercial development occurring on the southern end of the high street. Development would begin on the south side of Little Chico Creek. Block depths hovered around 240 feet, running mostly North-South. It is best to shy away from a southwest exposure, being that it is extremely hot during the summer.

Scheme two showed a similar high street configuration. Dan Parolek stated that the site could become a two transect zone project, with the large houses possibly terminating neighborhood streets instead of overlooking the creek.

Scheme three showed the high street running through the site, connecting 20th street and Bruce south of the creek. Four different versions of this scheme were created. Each dissected the site into three or four distinct neighborhoods. The orientation of the high street created a visual keyhole to the commercial district, in comparison to the re-routing of traffic accomplished by the first two schemes.



The fourth scheme showed a similar, but shorter, high street orientation, connecting the high street to Bruce further south on the site.

The fifth scheme eliminated development of the current meadow foam protection area.

John Anderson talked about the area on the site where the electric company will be placing a substation (south west side), and told the designers to work this into their future schemes. With the substation, comes the opportunity to realign the overhead power lines that currently cut diagonally across the northwest side of the site. The two options for realignment are to straighten the lines, but keep them overhead, or to bury them with realignment. It is also possible, but less desirable, to keep them in their current alignment.

Also, each new scheme should have an 'A' and 'B' version, with the 'A' being fully developed, and the 'B' leaving the current meadow foam protection area untouched. The main line sewer pipe running north / south through the site has a 30 foot (building front to building front) easement. There is also a sewer pipe which runs eastward along the creek side from the main line, but this pipe may be unimportant to the development schemes.

The next discussion revolved around the retail portion of the commercial district. Seth Harry started by explaining the retail likes simple diagrams in the conceptual level, something easy to follow. He then went on to say that the 150,000 to 200,000 square feet of retail which the

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development would maintain would best be housed in 2000 feet of continuous frontage, with visible anchors (such as a 35,000 square foot organic grocery). There are two ways to arrange restaurants and cafes: sprinkle them throughout the district, or preferably, gang them into a “café row”. He also stated that at least 50,000 square feet would need to be built to start, but reiterated that the entire Town Center could be built right away.

Patrick Siegman then gave some numbers on traffic counts that were taken in the area in 2000.

Bruce – South of Humboldt	8700 ADT
20 th – East of Forrest	8794 ADT
20 th – West of Forrest	17,500 ADT
20 th – West of Bruce	5200 ADT
Skyway – West of Notre Dame	35,000 ADT

The team then moved back into their small groups to begin working on the next generation of site planning schemes and begin to draw up schemes for some of the civic and commercial uses that could occur in the development, and at 5:30, with a crowd of 35 residents present, John Anderson began a discussion about the newest incarnation of the plan.

The audience was vocal, asking a lot of questions, and eventually the formal discussion broke up into more informal, one on one discussions as members of the public got closer to the drawings to get a better look and speak with the designers responsible for specific drawings.

As the crowd dissipated, the designers drifted over to the kitchen area to load up their dinner plates and ease themselves back into their drawings.

Saturday, December 6, 2003

The day started with focus group meetings in the morning. Citizen groups representing different Chico community institutions met with designers to discuss design and development issues central to those institutions. One group represented the school board, and the discussion revolved around the possibility of an urban high school site being incorporated into the north side of the development. Another group represented John Bidwell Memorial Presbyterian Church in the congregations desire to expand with a new church within the development site. These discussions informed the designers about what needs these institutions have and the scope of their stake in the development, and at the same time, informed the institutions about the development program and the opportunities open to them on the site.

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Then, the architects working on building types presented the drawings that they had come up with in the previous few days. These included floor plans and elevations for single family homes, apartments and commercial buildings. A suggestion was made to gather the entire design team together for a discussion about building styles and what architectural styles are appropriate for different building types the site. Leon Krier started off the exchange by explaining a matrix of styles that occurs within the urban form of a community and the community's architecture which he developed to test urban architecture, which he called "The 9 Ifs".



While the architects returned to working on building design, the rest of the designers each took a block section and got to work on the task of drawing a first attempt at lot configuration. By the evening review, the building styles had changed. A Mediterranean Revival style was chosen because it better addresses Chico's

environmental and climatic realities, and the elevation diagrams were redrawn to reflect that style change. This style is popular in Monterrey, and a good number of examples exist in Chico. The architects will continue their task by drawing up types that fit on the irregular lots that exist at curves in the street.

As far as the plan goes, the bridge crossing proposed by the city at Notre Dame was being looked at as a pedestrian bridge by the team, but after a discussion with the fire department, the team will return to looking at Notre Dame as a vehicular creek crossing. An automobile crossing will give emergency vehicles better access to southeast Chico.

Sunday, December 7, 2003

The team continued working on block and lot schemes and building types. Those working on building types started producing colored elevation renderings of the single-family home and commercial building types they had already devised, designing addition frontage styles for those floor plans and beginning to designing the multi-family buildings.

Work on street design progressed with sectional diagrams of street types. These sections correlated to a street type plan which he was developing in tandem with the sections.

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Laurie Volk, a market research consultant who arrived on Friday, worked on residential capacity studies. With the street network plan in mind and a limit of linear feet of frontage, she worked to match unit type numbers to a set of targets.



The Chico open space network was analyzed, as well as needs and possibilities within the development and precedent studies from other communities. Darin Dinsmore and Aaron Cook worked on creek sections, incorporating drives on either side of the creek, exploring the possible realignment of the bike path, and examining the different ways in which the linear park lining the creek could be orientated with a formal edge on the north side and a more informal edge on the south.

The designers focusing on the civic buildings, Howard Blackson and Lowell Hawkins, worked on a few schemes for a high school. These took two basic forms. In one, all of the school's facilities (ball fields, gymnasium, auditorium, school building) are incorporated on the same site. In the other scheme, the site is smaller, and some of the non-academic facilities are off site. In the evening, this team shifted their design work to a program for a church.

The CAD team, lead by Josh Pierce, created 3D models of the housing types and electronic versions of the site plan. Josh created a preliminary 3D model of the site, complete with models of the building types placed on the block structure. This computer model was created for use as a communication tool and for underlays for hand renderings.

In the afternoon, a local resident offered to take design team members on an aerial photography trip in his airplane. Steve Lawton and Leon Krier went on a flight over the site.



Residents filtered in throughout the day to see the current incarnation of the designs, talk to designers and offer their input. One resident even put on a small retail slideshow.

Sunday was also the day that work on the Charrette Document began. Eric Osth began placing images into the document template and authoring descriptions. Throughout the charrette, designs were scanned upon completion and (along with these summaries) saved into a predetermined filing structure. Each file was named according to a coded file naming format.

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Monday, December 08, 2003

The design work continued in deeper detail. Designers integrated the market absorption work that had been done into the plan by referencing the unit type and building frontage raw data that was produced on Sunday and interpreting that graphically by introducing lots onto the plan of the block pattern. The work was done in a progressive series, beginning with the placement of lots based on urban design, continuing with the counting of lots and measuring linear feet of frontage, then cross referencing the plan with the market absorption numbers and reworking the lot plan to fit the market goals.

Communication between the small design groups working on specific parts of the plan became even more important as the finer details of the plan came together. Traffic in the studio increased as team members traversed from work station to work station, from pin-up wall to computer screen making sure that they were on the same page as the folks working on other parts of the plan. This was exemplified by a meeting between designers working on housing types, blocks and lots, and the regulating plan, informing all groups in their efforts. This was the first formal meeting on the regulating plan during the charrette. Flexibility in depth of lots and certain building types was stressed to make both the regulating plan and the block and lot plan work more efficiently. Types (and their labels) were identified for the regulating plan, and another single family house type was identified.



In an effort to prepare for final draft production, Dan Parolek mixed the color palette for the watercolor renderings. With such a large number of people doing the rendering it is important that a standard color palette for consistency in readability is established.

Work also continued on the 3D computer massing model, street sections, civic site schemes, commercial district design, building type design and the Charrette Document as concepts were beginning to become finalized for Tuesday's final production and presentation.

Over the weekend, attendance at the evening plan reviews was down, minimizing their formality, but on Monday, a 30 people showed up. Since the team was so involved in production, a formal pin-up didn't take place. Instead, John Anderson lead citizens on a "walking tour" of the studio with the sites being the designers work stations and works-in-progress.

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At 7:00 pm, the final version of the plan was drawn at 1 : 200 scale. The plan and a figure ground of the current conditions (at 1 : 300) surrounding the site were taken to the copy shop to be copied, reduced and enlarged to match each other at 1 : 200 and 1 : 400 on paper and vellum for the final watercolor plans.

Tuesday, December 9, 2003

Two groups of students from Cal State Chico came to the studio on Tuesday morning and Josh Pierce gave them a presentation on the charrette process and the development plan. One group was a senior Design / Build class from a program of which Josh is a graduate.

Final drawings and watercolor renderings were produced throughout the day. As they were completed, they were scanned and saved electronically for printouts and inclusion in the Charrette Document. The Mike Musty, acting as the “Master Scanner” worked continuously scanning drawings throughout the day, let alone the entire week.

Work also was done on the regulating document. The neighborhood’s transect was identified a transect regulating plan colored to reflect the zones (T6 through T3) and the street regulating plan was finalized with seven street types. The Context Based Frontage Code was introduced as an option for a building code, incorporating both the neighborhood transect, street plan and building types with frontage types appropriate for each locational scenario.

The Closing Presentation was exhibited via a PowerPoint presentation.



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