MEMORANDUM

Date       July 20, 2018
To         City of Redondo Beach General Plan Advisory Committee
From       PlaceWorks
Subject    Land Use Plan: Summary of Policy Options for Blended Densities

Context  The current General Plan and zoning ordinance designate considerable areas of Redondo Beach for multi-family housing at densities ranging up to 28 units per acre. Today, many properties in these areas are not developed to their maximum permitted densities and contain a mix of units differing in type, size, and character. This results in a “checkerboard” pattern of single family, duplex, apartment, and condominium units. Some newer buildings have been built to their maximum footprints and lot coverage with minimal on-site landscape and exhibit a broad diversity of architectural design styles. Under current policies and regulations, parcels developed at lesser densities could be redeveloped more intensely, ultimately creating geographies with uniform building coverage, setbacks, bulk, and heights.

Discussion with the GPAC questions whether this is the appropriate long-term objective for some, if not all, of these areas as such may be inconsistent with visions for the character and quality of development and whether a policy to promote a mix of unit types and densities should be considered. The following discusses possible alternative approaches for achieving neighborhoods containing a blend of unit types, with supporting small scale commercial uses.

Two possible and related concerns should be considered in recommending a preferred approach. If an individual or small number of adjoining parcels receives a development entitlement inconsistent with surrounding existing uses and/or zoning, this could be considered as “spot zoning” and potentially is illegal. Such a practice also raises the issue of “inequity,” where property owners that are first to use up the unit allocations identified for a geographic area have economically “benefitted” over that of other property owners in the same immediate area, depending on the approach used. Ultimately, both concerns would need to be reviewed for their applicability by the City Attorney in consideration of any specific approach recommended by GPAC.

For the upcoming July 27 meeting, the GPAC should review these options, discuss their appropriateness and, if appropriate, select a preferred approach, and identify areas of the City for which the approach would be applied.

Option 1  Downzoning. In this option, the maximum permitted densities for a geographic area would be reduced below current standards. At a minimum, this density should be at least equivalent to the overall average density of all existing development within the area. This would allow modest intensification of properties currently developed primarily for single family housing and/or duplexes. As this could potentially affect existing mortgages and financing of improvements, it would be appropriate to allow re-building to the existing density of any unit fully destroyed by fire, earthquake, or other disaster with any reduction in permitted density. As “spot zoning” is illegal, this could only be applied to areas where

there is not a significant concentration of buildings constructed at or near the current permitted maximum density.

Option 2 Development Caps/Cumulative. In this option, the existing General Plan and zoning residential density designations would be retained with a limit imposed on the total number of housing units permitted in a defined geographic area that is less than would occur with buildout at the currently maximum permitted densities. Differing from Option 1 where any new housing development would be at lesser densities, in this option some parcels would be expected to be redeveloped for new buildings at the highest permitted densities, while others would be limited to their existing density when the development cap is reached. This could be administered on a “first-come, first-served” basis, or prioritizing projects that achieve community objectives based on performance criteria established by the City for such elements as high-quality design and sustainability. Like Option 1, the reconstruction to existing density of any housing unit lost because of a disaster should be allowed to mitigate concerns regarding mortgage financing.

Option 3 Development Caps/Density-Based. Like the preceding option, development caps or a percentage mix would be established for categories of housing products and densities—duplex, quadplex, two story townhome, garden apartment, and so on—for a geographic area. Setting capacities for specific types of housing would likely result in a greater mix of units within an area than Option 2. Again, this could be administered on a “first-come, first-served” basis or by prioritizing projects based on performance criteria.

Option 4 Transfer of Development Rights (TDR). In this option, the owner of a parcel may elect to sell the remaining development rights for a property, a “sending site,” to another property, a “receiving site.” This would enable an owner of a property developed or planned for development at a density below that permitted by the area’s zoning designation (e.g., a single-family house or duplex in an area designated as R-4) to be compensated for preserving an existing unit or developing at a lower density. This would offset possible issues of equity and fairness and require the identification of other areas in the City in which higher densities would be permitted generating sufficient value to make it desirable for a developer to purchase these rights.2

General Development/Performance Standards. Under any of the preceding options, or if it is the decision to continue current practices and permit full buildout at designated densities, it is recommended that additional standards be considered regulating the form and design of multi-family residential projects to achieve a higher level of design and architectural performance. These could address such elements as limiting building heights, requiring modulation of and reduction of vertical building mass (i.e., the second floor is smaller than the first, and so on), increased landscaped setbacks, and similar features. Effectively, these would reduce the overall building envelope on a parcel and beneficially improve neighborhood and character. These should be coupled with plans for public realm streetscapes and amenities as unifying elements tying individual parcel development together into a cohesive and identifiable neighborhood.

2Ibid, Fulton and Shigley
**Compatibility of Blended Densities.** Similarly, under any blended density option, these standards need to be expanded to avoid incompatibilities and improve the juxtaposition of differing building types, while enhancing the overall quality of development and landscape

**Neighborhood Retail and Service.** Independent of the options described above, it is suggested that small scale local-serving retail and service businesses be considered an acceptable use in blended density neighborhoods. Their location, size, and design should be regulated, and on-site parking prohibited to ensure their compatibility with and walkability from adjoining housing and their cumulative area limited to maintain the predominant residential function and character of the neighborhood.