

Taking Charge of the Future of Your Neighborhood: RE:codeLA

By Sharon Commins, past Chair, MVCC, and Co Chair, Citizens Advisory Committee Re:codeLA <http://recode.la/>

OK, so your eyes are glazing over already... what is this Re:codeLA and why should I care what 21 citizens are doing for the next 5 years? Planning and zoning seem remote—even irrelevant—from my life.

OR, maybe not...

Let's talk potential impacts to North Westdale: *Although the Re:codeLA process will not immediately change or 'rezone' the city, it has spurred some lively extracurricular outside dialog across the city on the nature of zoning, and what constitutes acceptable use patterns in traditional single family areas.*

For example, blog discussions of allowing more types of commercial and transient uses in single family neighborhoods to break up large areas of 'single use' zones: <http://la.streetsblog.org/2013/06/13/integrating-land-use-and-transportation-iii-homes-zone/> Boarding houses, bed and breakfast, coffee shops, cafes, hair salons, green grocers, design studios, or galleries could be established without a Conditional Use Permit [CUP] or notice to neighbors under this scenario.

Also, blog discussions of totally eliminating single family neighborhoods in the 'flats' of Los Angeles through rezoning to multiple family uses have surfaced [All of Mar Vista is in the 'flats, BTW]: <http://letsgola.wordpress.com/2013/12/20/a-modest-zoning-proposal/>

Indeed, some feel the single family home is obsolete, taking up too much 'underutilized land': http://www.huffingtonpost.com/stephen-c-rose/why-single-family-homes-a_b_174201.html

Other urban planners refer to front, back, and rear yards as sprawl induced 'privatized open space' which should be utilized for density: <http://www.planetizen.com/node/46481> They are pushing to eliminate the American Dream neighborhood housing choice altogether in favor of a Manhattan-esque squeezed, vertical lifestyle: <http://www.planningreport.com/2006/04/13/la-architects-open-letter-city-officials-planning-must-emerge-city-priority>

The challenge going forward, therefore, will be to retain North Westdale's excellent neighborhood balance and stable, supremely walkable, low density residential character.

And that means engaging with the Re:codeLA process to make YOUR community's preferences and desires known.

Furthermore, although rightfully preoccupied with the fight to close Santa Monica Airport, North Westdale will soon need to monitor its northeasterly border. That's because EXPO Line Phase 2 *will bring transit planning into the area* and significant external development pressures as well: <https://performance.lacity.org/Business/DBS-Percentage-Square-Ft-of-New-Development-Within/24d3-sihy> In fact, the typical transit planning 1/2 mile radius around the Sepulveda station picks up a portion of North Westdale—see this illustrative ZIMAS screen shot showing the radius in blue. Much, much higher densities are usually sought by planners within this radius, freeway barrier notwithstanding.



It is also unclear precisely how much station parking will be included. North Westdale may be actually subjected to 'spillover' commuter parking if the Sepulveda station proves as popular as Culver City—where the lot is full between 8 am-3 pm.

A brief word about the Master Planned Development Zone 'MPD' proposal now tracking independently of the Re:codeLA process: <http://cityplanning.lacity.org/> This new and relatively unrestricted zone would allow a developer to bring a minimum 3 acres project with 500 units or 500,000 square feet or more of non-residential floor.

So, what would 3 acres look like in North Westdale, size wise?

The Ralph's/Staples shopping center at Sawtelle and National measures 4.78 acres give or take. Imagine 500 units or 500,000 sq ft or more of nonresidential located here and shown in red on the map below.



By way of comparison: The late, unlamented Bundy Village & Medical Park proposed more than 500,000 square feet of commercial space on 11 acres and Martin Expo Town Center has plans for just over 800,000 square feet of total floor area on 4.76 acres. NOTE: Only 2 members of the public were at the 1 pm downtown hearing on the MPD ordinance last month, Cary Brazeman and myself. *By the time this article appears in print, the City Planning Commission will have voted on the Re:codeLA draft paper [especially see the Executive Summary pages 10-13 and the Planning supplemental report] and the report will move to the City Council Planning and Land Use Management Committee and ultimately to the full City Council this summer.*

So, to recap:

What Re:codeLA IS: the 5-year revamping of Los Angeles' insanely obtuse zoning code into a cleaner and more predictable format. Old zones will be worked into a 'new palette' of base zones and brand new zones will be explored: think hybrid tech/commercial or tech/industrial zones. <http://recode.la/stay-informed/news/minding-our-ds-and-qs%E2%80%A6-what%E2%80%99s-recode-la-really>

What Re:codeLA is NOT: a wholesale rezoning of the city. The community planning process would be used to promote change and any contemplated rezoning would occur as each plan goes through the update process.

Why we need Re:codeLA: The challenge in bringing our zoning code into the 21st century is, there are actually 3 codes:

- the 'official' zoning code with all the ordinances
- the Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety 'interpretation' of the official code
- the 'shadow' code—decisions made over time by Zoning Administrators and often used as precedent for cases

This makes for confusion in interpretation as well as poor code enforcement.

These three codes will be organized into one code with explanatory maps/graphics so you, ordinary citizen, can look up an address and find out precisely what has been done to a property...and equally importantly, what *COULD* be done to a property—all without hiring a land use attorney for third party translation of the code.

The project lead consultant is Code Studios out of Austin, Texas: <http://www.code-studio.com/> It is well worth the time to check out their other code projects and see the results for yourself: <http://www.code-studio.com/projects.html>

Finally: Take charge at: <http://recode.la/> Sign up for the newsletter. And, for basic understanding of the project, start by reading the first-rate FAQ "Minding Our Ds and Qs". All the papers and presentations we see at our Zoning Advisory Committee—aka "ZAC"-- meetings are on the website as well as articles clarifying zoning tools. Public comment is invited and welcomed.

It's your neighborhood and your future. Stay informed.

Sharon Commins served as an At Large Director on the Mar Vista Community Council Board of Directors, and most recently served as Chair. She also co-chairs the Westside Regional Alliance of Councils Land Use and Planning Committee, and is a member of PLANcheck NC's Steering Committee. The views expressed in this article are her own.