



Central Bench Neighborhood Association

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Dear Mayor Bieter, City of Boise Planning and Zoning Commission Members, Boise City Council Members, and Boise City Design Review Council Members:

The 7-acre parcel on the SW corner of Franklin Road and Orchard Street has been a focal point for the Central Bench since the neighborhood was established. For more than 100 years this site housed Franklin School in one form or another, educating many generations of Boise's youth. It has been the hub of connectivity for the community that was built around it. It served as a gathering place, drawing neighbors as a polling place, a gymnasium for community informational meetings, and an outdoor space for children to play and for neighbors to walk dogs. It was the neighborhood landmark, the source of pride for neighborhood members, and the historic centerpiece of the community.

When the Boise School District closed Franklin School in 2008 it closed the only school within the Central Bench boundaries and left a hole in the fabric of the community and the neighborhood. To pour salt in a community-wide wound, the historic building was demolished in 2011, erasing any trace of a once-vibrant center of community activity. Since then the site has been an eyesore, an empty lot vacant of life aside from the weeds, and trees that remind us of what used to be.

However with change comes opportunity, and hope for what is next. The Central Bench is a neighborhood that is blooming as it evolves. The location, wide range of small local businesses, diverse ethnic groups, and full spectrum of generations make the Central Bench a dynamic and increasingly desirable neighborhood to live and conduct business. Opportunities to build the Central Bench into a great neighborhood are burgeoning and are being recognized and realized by community members and business owners alike.

The City of Boise also recognized the potential of this changing neighborhood and seized the opportunity to build a lasting investment in the Central Bench by purchasing the southwestern corner of the Franklin site to construct a park. Community members applauded city leaders' foresight in placing the future park in a historically and culturally relevant location. City leaders no doubt also recognized the unique characteristics of this location: tucked just off a highly utilized corridor leading to downtown with many options to increase pedestrian and cyclist connectivity, set in the transition zone between commercial and residential areas, with adjacent parcels available for development. They saw potential.

Community members too began to imagine what might develop in the remaining parcels. Neighbors chatted casually about what could develop to make the neighborhood even better. What would be the optimal compliment to a brand new neighborhood park? What

does the neighborhood need most? What can facilitate community activity and build community pride? What would be built on the grave of Franklin School, a neighborhood centerpiece still fresh in the community's mind?

The vision for this site held by members of the Central Bench community is this: a social, cultural and economic center, a place that puts the pedestrian and cyclist first, a place for the community to gather and linger. Something to make the Central Bench a more livable neighborhood to help Boise reach its goal of being "The most livable city in the country." Many of Boise's neighborhoods have successful examples of this: Bown Crossing, Hyde Park, and the 36th Street Garden Center.

The Franklin site is a blank slate. It is possible to create what the Project for Public Spaces defines as a Great Place: "Great public spaces are those places where celebrations are held, social and economic exchanges occur, friends run into each other, and cultures mix." The City has taken the first step to recreate the Franklin site into a Great Place by designating a park. Community members now hope to collaborate with the City to ensure the developments on the remaining acreage also align with this vision for smart, safe and community centered planning.

The City of Boise's comprehensive plan Blueprint Boise opens by describing citywide policies, including "A Community with Stable Neighborhoods and Vibrant, Mixed-Use Activity Centers" with the standard to "Ensure neighborhoods are served by a hierarchy of mixed use activity centers". It's no wonder that Blueprint Boise designates the intersection of Franklin and Orchard, including the Franklin site, as a Community Activity Center. As stated on page 3-10, "Community Activity Centers (CAC) are intended to meet the needs of a group of neighborhoods and the entire community."

This is just what the Central Bench needs. A dynamic social, cultural and economic centerpiece that can replace some of what was lost when Franklin School closed. A place designed for the pedestrian and cyclist that smartly and safely integrates the distinct characteristics of the Franklin site, the open space of the park with the economic and social activity of a mixed-use neighborhood center. Here is the opportunity to create a brilliant jewel in the crown that is Boise's vibrant neighborhoods, a unique community centerpiece.

Given the designation of the Franklin site as a CAC, the rare circumstance of a retail development site abutting a neighborhood park, along with the vision neighborhood members share for future developments, the CBNA strongly supports a Pedestrian Commercial (PC) rezone for all parcels. The board agreed on the PC zone after soliciting community member input, consulting with industry professionals and conducting research. Pedestrian Commercial zoning also aligns with the City's specifications for what a Community Activity Center should look like.

Blueprint Boise specifies that the primary mix of uses for a CAC include: "A variety of retail, commercial, professional offices, financial institutions, and high-density residential, including live-work units" (3-10). The plan goes on to identify that these activity centers "Will provide a range of commercial/retail services not currently available in the immediate neighborhood."

A coffee shop. A café or bakery. Apartments. A bike shop. A day spa. There is a long list of what could come to this parcel that would serve the neighborhood. However, form is just as important as function. This future development should activate the corner, be designed to prioritize pedestrian and cyclist use and facilitate community activity as described in Blueprint Boise and Design Standards and Guidelines.

The Mixed-Use Space of a CAC should:

- Meet Boise’s Citywide Goal #5: A Community That Values Its Culture, Education, Arts and History states the City will “Support the development of public spaces that promote community gatherings and cultural events” (Blueprint Boise 2-59). Small, service-oriented retail and residential along with the coming park on the Franklin parcel would reactive it as a community gathering place.
- “Incorporate schools, plazas, libraries, parks and open space, and other community facilities into activity centers where appropriate to serve the needs of neighborhood residents” (Blueprint Boise 3-4). City leaders have met one of these intents by locating a future park adjacent to this site; however constructing plazas and community facilities along with retail and residential would fill a gap missing in the Central Bench neighborhood – places to gather and connect.
- Follow the intents described in Design Standards and Guidelines: “To create a variety of pedestrian areas in retail and mixed use developments, to provide safe, attractive, and usable open space that promote pedestrian activity; to create usable open space that is suitable for leisure and recreational activities for residents; to create open space that enhances the setting and character of residential, commercial, and mixed use development; and to promote a variety of open spaces for multifamily uses” (pg. 46). Encouraging residential development would not only bring vibrancy to the center, it would make the coming park safer, further promote walking/cycling and attract service-oriented retail and businesses.
- Address “the relationship of uses; housing; community facilities; pedestrian access and orientation; and distinct identity and are intended to promote a more compact and sustainable pattern of development in the city’s activity centers over time” (Blueprint Boise 3-14). Along with pedestrian friendly, service oriented retail, what will activate and create long-term vibrancy is compact housing.
- Encouraging high density residential is also outlined in Blueprint Boise stating: “Encourage high-density residential development as part of new activity centers and the revitalization of existing centers (NAC2.2).
- Minimize conflict between pedestrians and vehicles and should follow the intents described in Design Standards and Guidelines: “To provide safe and direct pedestrian access in commercial and multi-family areas; to minimize conflicts between pedestrians and vehicular traffic; to provide a network of pathways that can be expanded over time; to provide attractive internal pedestrian routes that promote walking and enhance the character of the area; and to create a safe, convenient, and efficient network for vehicular circulation and parking” (pg 37). These speak for themselves. The PC zoning coupled with these guidelines would

increase safety for current pedestrians and cyclists as well as encourage and promote alternative transportation in a growing neighborhood.

- Incorporate a pattern of walkable blocks in activity centers with frequent and clear pedestrian connections to surrounding neighborhoods, transit corridors and stops, parks, trails and open space (Blueprint Boise 3-15). Nearby access to the Greenbelt, bike routes as well as parks make this an ideal center of connectivity for pedestrians and cyclist.
- “Orient buildings with an emphasis on the character and safety of the pedestrian realm: bring buildings close to the street, place parking behind or to the side of buildings and provide clear pedestrian connections with generous sidewalk widths, low-level lighting and outdoor gathering spaces” (Blueprint Boise 3-15). To attract pedestrians and cyclists and fully activate the corner for the community it should be designed with those users in mind.
- Follow the intent of High Visibility Street Corners: “To enhance the character and identity of Boise neighborhoods, and to enhance the pedestrian environment at street corners” (Design Standards and Guidelines 3.6). Franklin is an artery that leads to downtown. The development of the Franklin parcel along a highly utilized street should reflect the sense of place for the community and the notable identity of Boise’s neighborhoods that contribute towards making it a livable city.
- Follow the key objectives outlined in the Central Bench Plan: “Protection of established neighborhood character and livability” (Blueprint Boise CB-1). The Central Bench is establishing its identity as a neighborhood as it evolves. Public art installments sponsored through City of Boise Neighborhood Reinvestment grants, an active neighborhood association, small and local businesses, community gardens, and new residents are all contributing toward building a greater sense of pride and sense of place for the Central Bench. Residents want a neighborhood, not an auto-centric corridor.
- Align with the City’s future plans to re-energize the Orchard Street Corridor specified to: “Encourage a mix of small-scale, pedestrian-oriented commercial, retail and higher-density residential uses along Orchard Street” (Blueprint Boise’s Central Bench Plan CB-CNN 1.3)
- Provide a variety of retail options that serve the neighborhood: “Frontages are intended to be the most vibrant and activated shopping and dining areas within the city” (Design Standards and Guidelines pg 17). Not only will dining and shopping activate the corner and attract the pedestrian and cyclist, it will provide economic stability and meet the needs of the community.
- Design activity centers to support existing and planned transit. Cluster activity-generating uses, such as retail stores, restaurants, and daily services along transit corridors and surrounding transit stops and provide direct pedestrian access (Blueprint Boise 3-15)

The CBNA board has been in regular contact with Maverik Inc since the parcel was purchased in December 2014 and is aware of Maverik's plans to develop a gas station and convenience store at this historic corner. Community members feel strongly that this proposed development does not meet the needs of the community nor align with the vision described in City documents and supported by neighborhood members. In fact, members have expressed considerable and significant concerns regarding the development proposed by Maverik.

Through community outreach the CBNA has uncovered many concerns of how to successfully and safely integrate a park in such close proximity to the high-volume gas station Maverik is proposing, as well as how yet another gas station affects the character of our community. Specific concerns include:

- There is simply no need for a gas station at this location as there are eight existing gas stations within a 1-mile radius, with the majority within just a few blocks. As noted above, a CAC is intended to meet the needs of the neighborhood. A gas station is more of the same instead of the mixed uses defined by Blueprint Boise.
- Installing a gas station is not consistent with the pedestrian environment the City desires for a CAC as outlined in the bullet points above.
- Neighborhood members want a place to gather and linger. A gas station and convenience store serves the only-passing-through, on-the-go motorist, leaving little to no opportunity for building the vibrant communities and activity centers described in Blueprint Boise.
- The Franklin and Orchard intersection is highly utilized, often with congestion. Traffic counts on Orchard Street near the site are 20,393 vehicles per day. Installing a high-volume gas station at that corner will only increase congestion, which discourages pedestrian use, even at crosswalks, for park users coming from the north and east.
- If gas station ingresses/egresses are placed on side streets, headlights will shine into existing residential windows at all hours of the day and night, reducing the existing quality of life for those residents.
- Ingresses/egresses along Franklin and Orchard streets will break up the walk zone leading to the park as well as existing residential neighborhoods, not only discouraging pedestrians and cyclists but also increasing the risk of incidents.
- How does the installation of yet another gas station affect the character of the neighborhood? Blueprint Boise's key objectives in the Central Bench Plan are to: "Protection of established neighborhood character and livability" (CB-1). Installing another gas station along an artery to downtown further defines the area as a car-centric corridor instead of the community and pedestrian-oriented neighborhood residents desire.

- One of the highlights of living on the Bench is the lovely views of the foothills. Tall fueling canopies and neon signs will significantly diminish the unique viewshed of the Boise Foothills for current residents as well as future park users.
- The City desires greater pedestrian and cyclist access for Boise neighborhoods (ACHD Bicycle/Pedestrian Plan). A park would increase the need for greater and safer access. Putting a high-volume vehicle generating business such as a gas station in close proximity to a park, even with the best of designs, compounds risk of pedestrian/vehicle accidents.
- Maverik stores are open 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Lights on tall fueling canopies, even if directed straight down, produce light pollution for existing residents. City parks are open sunrise to sunset, yet 24 hour lighting, easy and direct access to the park, and alcohol sales in the store are risk factors for undesirable behavior in the park after dark. This same light pollution could impact potential community events from taking place in the park, for example the City supported “Movies Under the Stars”, further diminishing opportunities to build sense of place and pride for neighborhood residents.
- Though modern gas stations are designed to be environmentally safer, the risk of spills, leaks or air quality contamination is inherent. The risk, however small, is too great to be located adjacent to a community park.
- When Maverik decides to close the proposed gas station, even if it’s 50 or 100 years into the future, the neighborhood and City will be left with a brown field and polluted soil. Not only would this blight be located adjacent to a well-established park, it would be a costly and extensive project to deal with. Blueprint Boise’s first citywide policy under Quality of Life is environmental stewardship. It states, “Boise is committed to becoming a more sustainable community by taking steps to reduce its impact on the environment.” A gas station is not consistent with the long-term vision held by community members of the Central Bench.
- As members of this community, we want economic success for our neighborhood. A gas station would not bring the long term, economic vibrancy that a mixed-use center of retail and service-oriented businesses would provide. Small scale space in this location would likely attract local businesses, further providing economic stability and growth to Boise.
- Our City is committed to offering and encouraging healthy food choices throughout Boise. This standard should be displayed with the greatest commitment near a park where healthy lifestyle decisions are promoted and facilitated. Maverik convenience stores are stocked with processed, sugared and salted foods that are inconsistent with the healthy lifestyle choices the City of Boise is striving to encourage.

As quoted from one community member from a Placemaking Workshop hosted by the CBNA, the redevelopment of the Franklin site should “maintain historical relevance and significance to our community.” We don’t need another gas station. We need a gathering

place. We need a place where people come together. We need a social, economic and cultural centerpiece that is built for the pedestrian and cyclist, not the car. We need mixed use retail with residential to activate the historic Franklin School site once again, not more of the same that doesn't serve the Central Bench community. Please help us make a Great Place for the Central Bench and surrounding areas by zoning the Franklin site parcels Pedestrian/Commercial and limiting development to meet the needs and preserve the character of the neighborhood.

Sincerely,

Members of the Central Bench Neighborhood Association

*For your reference, a letter previously sent from the CBNA regarding development of the Franklin site should be included with this letter.