



# City of Oakland: Safety Element Focus Group Discussion #3

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October 19, 2022 10:00 AM – 11:30 AM

Held via Zoom

## Participating Organizations:

- Urban Strategies Council
- City of Oakland Emergency Services, Fire Department
- Roots Community Center
- Department of Violence Prevention
- Family Violence Law Center
- City of Oakland, public works, watershed division
- Catholic Charities East Bay
- Youth Employment Partnership
- City of Oakland, Department of Transportation

Meeting facilitated by Alison Moore of Dyett & Bhatia

## DISCUSSION SUMMARY

The structure of the discussion began with an initial presentation on the Safety Element as part of the General Plan and how feedback from the community can be incorporated to improve safety in the City. Following the presentation there was an informal discussion with the whole group.

In this discussion, participants discussed their organizations' perspectives on using community design, land use, and city services to address safety in Oakland. Key themes that emerged included equitable investment and economic opportunities and addressing the needs of communities that have been ignored or have experienced disinvestment. Safety policies should be aimed at ensuring the relationship between Oakland residents and the built environment is a positive one.

Participants discussed improving and expanding community spaces as well as improving cleanliness across the city as a critical factor in increasing feelings of safety. Many felt that



certain places in Oakland lacked sufficient and accessible community spaces such as parks, local businesses, recreation centers, libraries, and churches, which contributes to a lack of vibrancy and human presence in the City. They felt that formalizing informal gathering spaces would be a useful tool to create safety by building community. In addition, participants discussed the discrepancy in certain areas being consistently cleaner than others. It is important for locals that the area around them looks and feels pleasant to be in, as these factors ground feelings of safety.

Participants discussed that observations of homelessness and trash throughout the City can inhibit community pride and discourages youth specifically from valuing and seeing their community as a positive place to move through and live in. A participant offered a suggestion to focus on increasing reliability and cleanliness of public facilities as one way to improve already existing public spaces. Participants also felt a greater onus on the city to lead on citywide cleanup efforts could produce more sustainable change. This might also include traffic improvements and shared streets to encourage community activity.

Improvements to transit and transit investments was also discussed by the group. Participants cited the importance of involving community input in new transit projects, which would help to increase efficiency and reliability of the project. For example, participants discussed that young people should have safe and reliable transit to and from school regardless of which area of Oakland they live in. Business interruptions around 73<sup>rd</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> Avenues during transit construction were offered as examples as leading to lost local business revenue. In addition, the rapid bus system may decrease feelings of safety because of limited routes into neighborhoods to directly access vulnerable populations like the elderly. Therefore, greater opportunities for community consultation for transit investments could result in increased use and community satisfaction. Participants also discussed the importance of creating more equitable job opportunities when these investments happen.

Participants felt ultimately that while community design and land use and city services do contribute to feelings of safety and creating a beautiful city, maintaining cleanliness and safety over the long term requires adequate and equitable funding and more responsibility from the City, property owners and developers. Participants discussed that if safety is important to the City, there should be a consistent budget to address these issues.

Essential policies that participants hope to see in the Safety Element include:

- Increased pedestrian and bicycle safety
- Geographically equitable investments from the City
- Increased cleanliness, especially in areas that have experienced disinvestment

### **Community Design**

- Slow streets in neighborhoods could help with vehicle traffic safety and increase active use of public spaces like streets



- Indicators for safety often related to accessibility of good schools
  - Being able to walk to a good school in one’s neighborhood
  - Limited homelessness and policing around school
- Efficient, equitable transportation networks for all schools in Oakland should be a priority to increase safety
- Besides transportation, providing safer and more positive places for youth to travel through to go to school starts with investments in housing and city-wide cleanup
- Should have community input be a priority before embarking on transit investment and projects so that money is spent more effectively
  - Without community input, one participant felt negative impacts occurred in east Oakland where businesses lost revenue around 73<sup>rd</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> Avenues and that the resulting bus system does not serve Oakland residents needs
- Create opportunities to beautify Oakland with community engagement projects
  - Increase local food growth, increase the tree canopy
- Transforming vacant lots into green spaces
  - Communities United For Restorative Youth Justice has developed a community garden near their office with murals and programming for youth
- Formalize informal gathering spaces in the city such as natural green space where vending could happen
  - Other ideas include East Oakland at the corner of Bancroft and 73<sup>rd</sup>
  - People gather outside around International and East 14<sup>th</sup> street, providing furniture or minimizing barriers that keep people from wanting to gather
- Windows/frontages that are visible in commercial areas adds to safety
- Taller buildings feel less safe/colder
- Mixed-use ground floors could increase safety and accessibility of high-rises rather than empty floors with security guards
- Shorter buildings in neighborhoods with glass fronts can make people feel a little more welcome
- Need to increase opportunities for neighborhood level retail such as corner stores rather than strip malls on arterials
  - Major shift to work from home means that stores clustered in downtown serve less of a purpose
  - Those at home have limited access to services, focus on small commercial opportunities



## Land Use and City Services

- Homelessness is a complex issue to address and respond to, but critical to increase safety in Oakland
  - Addressing solutions to the roots of the problem such as lack of mental health support and poverty would be more effective ways to adequately support vulnerable populations
- Participants agreed that property owners and land owners should have greater responsibility to keep their property clean and safe, including vacant lots
- Greater effort could be taken by the City to lead on ensuring that communities are clean and not “dumping grounds”
  - As opposed to residents having to consistently organize and take on street cleaning efforts
  - Public Works could work with youth to create murals and paint where there is tagging on walls
  - Public Works could clean up with neighborhood residents to do clean-up safely, could also be part of diversion programs and summer employment for youth
- Barriers to access already existing community spaces
  - Limited grocery stores in certain communities, parks may be occupied by encampments
  - Increasing local businesses and housing could allow for greater use of public spaces that physically exist but are not available or safe for use
- Public restrooms and water fountains important to maintain usable facilities that affects cleanliness of public spaces
- Investing in anchor institutions such as key local non-profits may be one way to implement effective safety measures
- Creating opportunity for informal community gathering is an important way to more immediately address safety rather than a plaza or community building that takes a long time to build
- Community gathering ideas
  - Café spaces for free or low-cost open mic events, geared toward younger audiences
  - Blocking off sections of the street certain parts of the month for vendors, create a business and community opportunity
  - Allowing certain vendors in parks
  - Increasing accessibility of public libraries via transit and improved parking
  - Improve rec centers



- Kids would have a more productive outlet and way to interact with people in their city through sports or other activities
- Community in rec centers could trickle out into the community
- Creating safety but encouraging community
- Increasing funding for violence prevention, afternoon programming, childcare, investing in essential services
- Supporting small business development and homeownership affordability for Oaklanders
- Increase on-the-ground surveying for more collaborative and accessible community engagement
- Push for greater community reinvestment from developers, ie. Provide jobs and affordable housing at a certain percentage
- Caring for green space that already exists important to maintaining cleanliness and safety
- Creating community safety groups hired from neighbors
  - Provide economic development and job resources