

Here's how Oakland is planning for massive growth downtown

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With a population projected to swell in the coming years, Oakland is bracing for a changing downtown.

That means planning for up to 29,000 new residential units and nearly 14 million square feet of office space in downtown alone, the city said in a new document — all while addressing many Oaklanders' swirling questions about how Oakland can maintain its racial diversity and affordability.

"If you look at Oakland and where a substantial amount of the growth is going to occur, it's going to happen in the center of the Bay Area, which is here," said [John Protopappas](#) of Madison Park Financial, one of the city's most prolific developers.

On Wednesday, the city released a draft plan for its downtown specific plan that laid out the city's economic development priorities through 2040. The 300-page document tackles affordability, culture, global warming, land use and more. Oakland's new zoning for downtown development would allow for:

Up to 29,000 new housing units

17.2 million square feet of new commercial space, including 13.8 million square feet of office

14,062 parking spaces

Those numbers aim to accommodate the projected 49,431 new residents and 59,598 new employees joining downtown before 2040.

The influx of people and new development also raises questions of equity. The city aims for 4,350 to 7,250 of the new units to be affordable and will also consider setting aside some housing for artists who meet "specific income and occupational requirements."

Actually hitting that number of affordable units could happen in a number of ways, said [Ed Manasse](#), interim deputy director of the Oakland Planning Department, such as expediting the approval process for 100 percent affordable projects, creating an inclusionary housing program or an enhanced infrastructure financing district for downtown. The city also may relax ordinances to make adaptive reuse of buildings easier.

Another stipulation? Adding an impact fee for condominium conversions and limiting the size of buildings



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Oakland aims to add up to 29,000 new housing units and nearly 14 million square feet of office space downtown by 2040.

that can be converted. Additionally, the city may expand the definition of "displacement."

"We'll be looking for strong protections against displacement," said Jeff Levin, policy director at East Bay Housing Organizations, a nonprofit that advocates for affordable housing. "Intense development in downtown is likely to create more displacement pressure. That's something we'll be looking at closely."

Yet when it comes to development, the city will have to balance impact fees with the need to compete for development alongside other attractive cities in the East Bay, Protopappas said, including San Leandro and Berkeley.

"That's where Oakland needs to change its incentives, because we want to encourage the smaller parcels and the smaller property owners to invest capital in their property," Protopappas said.

The plan itself, though, will act as an incentive for market-rate housing, Manasse said, because its environmental impact report will study the impacts of development in advance and therefore speed up the approval process.

But that can be tougher than anticipated to pull off. In San Francisco, the rezoning of the "Hub" district hit multiple delays over the years, with some developers pursuing projects outside the plan because they weren't sure what it would ultimately contain.

The draft for downtown Oakland's environmental impact review is slated for completion this August, and the finalized plan should wrap up about a year later in summer 2020.

To get involved in the planning process, you can attend the next public hearing on the draft at the Jan. 23 Planning Commission meeting, or send an email to plandowntownoakland@oaklandca.gov.

"It's always better for people to weigh in earlier rather than later," Levin said.

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