

# JP Morgan Chase Bank abandons plans for a new 4100-square-foot office

## HILLSDALE NOTEBOOK

By Scott Mobley  
The Southwest Portland Post

JP Morgan Chase Bank's recent decision to drop plans for a Southwest Capitol Highway branch office should rekindle long-term efforts to urbanize the Hillsdale Town Center, some neighborhood leaders are saying.

But the neighborhood will face serious challenges meeting those goals even with well-laid plans, others say.

Hillsdale risks becoming a generic "weigh station on the way to Beaverton" if the neighborhood doesn't seize opportunities to bulk up its central shopping area, said John Gould, a land use attorney, Hillsdale Neighborhood Association member and 40-year resident.

More stores and apartments would mean needed critical mass for local merchants, he said.

Gould is one of many who had strongly opposed Chase Bank's planned single-use, one-story branch building at 6361 SW Capitol Hwy next to the Baskin Robbins outlet, calling it a squandered development opportunity for the town center.

Hillsdale neighborhood and business associations should lobby Portland City

Hall for stronger zoning policies that will attract density to the district, said Gould.

"We need to find a way to break the current inertia and induce higher investment," said Gould. "Chase did us a favor by hitting us over the head so we don't give away our land to single uses that don't cure the situation."

But neighborhood leaders can't simply demand developers build what they want and expect to automatically get it, said Sheila Greenlaw-Fink, who heads Community Partners for Affordable Housing (CPAH), a local non-profit.

Hillsdale is well positioned to negotiate with developers based on a neighborhood plan emphasizing multi-story, mixed-used development in the town center, Greenlaw-Fink said.

Yet mixed retail and residential buildings are riskier and more complex to build than commercial strips, she said. Not many developers are willing to take that risk.

According to Greenlaw-Fink, "Without local incentives, as exist in urban renewal or enterprise zones, we may be waiting a long time."

"The developer would need to prove that a market exists for their product, which by virtue of the design standards and neighborhood input would produce higher rent and lease rates than the current Town Center inventory," said

Greenlaw-Fink.

"They would need to attract new businesses willing and able to pay substantially higher rates," she said.

CPAH, the nonprofit Greenlaw-Fink directs, recently completed the Watershed, a four-story affordable housing center on the far west side of Hillsdale's commercial area.

On that project, neighborhood leaders helped raise money for features they wanted which the developer could not provide such as a public bench, drinking fountain and the building's illuminated "Hillsdale" marquee.

But 2,700-square feet of retail planned for the Watershed's ground floor are serving as offices for the non-profit since no businesses have come forward to lease the space.

The debate over whether Hillsdale should urbanize its commercial core ended long ago, Gould said.

Town Center zoning calls for development designed to limit auto use and encourage transit, walking and biking under a development plan in place since 1997.

And Hillsdale has long been a transit node, with 10 bus routes serving the business district.

Yet the commercial core remains essentially suburban and oriented for private cars and trucks despite this plan.

The low-slung 1950s-era parking lot-fronted shopping strips lining SW Capitol Highway have changed little over the years beyond some cosmetic touches.

The struggle over the character of development at 6361 SW Capitol Hwy

goes back at least to 2008, when crews leveled a former Texaco service station on the lot.

Wardin Investment Co., which owns the property and much of the surrounding commercial land, had originally planned to redevelop the lot itself. Architectural drawings show a single-story, 7,800-square foot building with four retail spaces lining the sidewalk.

A bike shop and other prospective tenants for the Wardin building withdrew as the Great Recession deepened in 2009.

Chase stepped in with a 30-year lease proposal in 2010. In August Chase asked the city for permission to build a 4,100-square-foot office -- less than half the minimum size required under the Hillsdale Town Center Plan.

The Chase proposal drew protest from neighborhood and business association members who said it did not realize Hillsdale's vision.

The bank in November agreed to a larger building along with canopy-covered parking and sidewalks to meet zoning requirements.

Hillsdale leaders welcomed Chase's willingness to work with the neighborhood, though the canopy idea irritated many residents all the more.

Some 600 signed a petition in December opposing the Chase revisions and asking the multinational bank for a mixed-use, two-story building.

Chase in late February instead abandoned the project. Neighborhood leaders now hope to attract a credit union that would anchor a mixed-use development at the former Texaco property.



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