



## **Afternoon Grind Session 2 (1/20/26)**

Afternoon Grind scenarios are designed to facilitate discussion about commercial corridors, neighborhood vibrancy, and policy tools that can be used to support local businesses during periods of change.

The scenarios below are drawn from a discussion held on January 20, 2026, and reflect participant perspectives on zoning, taxation, and commercial strategy. Facilitators posed prompts to invoke both practical tools and unresolved questions related to displacement, land use, and community-serving businesses. All scenarios are fictional but grounded in real policy tensions.

### **Scenario 1: Commercial Corridor Improvements and Small Business Stability**

A commercial corridor is slated for a major streetscape improvement (new sidewalks, lighting, and trees). While these upgrades are welcome, property values and rents are expected to rise immediately, potentially displacing the very businesses that have anchored the neighborhood for decades.

#### **Prompt:**

What specific zoning incentives or rent stabilization tools should the city implement before the ribbon-cutting to ensure long-term local businesses aren't priced out by the improvements they advocated for?

- Tax abatement first ten years with additional language owner
- CIDs small
- Comprehensive development plan or neighborhood plans

#### **Discussion Takeaways and Questions:**

- Participants emphasized the importance of early intervention, not post-displacement remedies. Tools must be in place before property values rise.
- A proposed approach included a 10-year property tax freeze for local or legacy businesses, allowing them to remain stable during the initial appreciation period. New businesses could be taxed at a higher rate to help offset the revenue impact.
- Comparisons were made to senior property tax exemptions, raising the question of whether similar exemptions could be extended to businesses that function as community anchors.



- A key concern was ensuring that tax benefits for landowners are passed through to tenants, rather than absorbed without rent relief.
- Stronger commercial tenant protection agreements were identified as a gap, with past developments (e.g., high-profile studio projects) cited as cautionary examples.
- Participants discussed whether Community Improvement Districts (CIDs) could be leveraged to address abatement concerns, functioning similarly to Tax Allocation Districts (TADs), though questions remained about:
  - How CIDs differ from TADs in practice
  - Whether initial funding would need to come from the city
  - How accountability and equity would be ensured
- Determining which businesses qualify as “anchor businesses” emerged as a critical challenge. Suggested criteria included:
  - Length of time operating in the neighborhood
  - Whether the business provides an essential or culturally relevant service
  - Alignment with the neighborhood’s comprehensive plan
- Participants stressed the importance of resident input in defining anchors and incentives, to avoid policies that unintentionally accelerate gentrification.
- Zoning questions surfaced around business mix and aesthetics, including whether overconcentration of certain uses (e.g., multiple tire shops) reflects a zoning issue, a market issue, or a design concern.
- While parcel-by-parcel strategies were seen as more precise, they were also described as time- and resource-intensive, requiring sustained community engagement.

### **Scenario 2:** Passive Commercial Uses and Corridor Vibrancy

A neighborhood corridor is seeing a surge in "passive" uses—like storage facilities or private offices—that don't generate foot traffic or serve the daily needs (groceries, pharmacy, cafes) of the surrounding residents.

#### **Prompt:**



If you were rewriting the Neighborhood Commercial District codes, which specific types of businesses would you "fast-track" for approval, and which would you restrict to ensure the corridor remains a vibrant, walkable resource for residents?

- Banks
- Pre-k/ early childhood
- Dentist
- Co-working space
- Hardwood stores
- Goodwill
- Medical
- Bookstores

#### **Discussion Takeaways and Questions:**

- Participants agreed that businesses encouraging social interaction should be prioritized to strengthen neighborhood life and informal community connections.
- There was interest in pairing commercial recruitment with workforce development and education incentives, using these tools to attract employers who invest in local residents.
- Medical and health-related uses were seen as valuable anchors, including:
  - Dental offices
  - Urgent care centers
  - Pediatric urgent care
- Grocery stores were repeatedly identified as a high priority but difficult to attract, given their lower return on investment compared to other commercial options.
  - This raised questions about what additional incentives or subsidies might be necessary to make grocery development feasible in emerging or transitioning neighborhoods.
- Participants debated how zoning and code enforcement could better distinguish between financially productive uses and socially productive uses, and whether both should be weighed in approval processes.