

A G E N D A I T E M

BUSINESS OF THE PLANNING AGENCY City of Des Moines, WA

SUBJECT: Marina District Design Guidelines
1. Section III.B. Height, Bulk Scale
2. Section III.C. Architectural Elements and Materials

NOTE: Bring your Design Guidelines and background materials to the meeting.

FOR AGENDA OF: January 25, 2010

DEPT. OF ORIGIN: Planning, Building & Public Works

DATE SUBMITTED: January 13, 2009

CLEARANCES:

[X] PB &PW DIRECTOR: GF

Purpose and Recommendation

The purpose of this agenda item is to solicit Agency member comments on the *Section III.B. Height, Bulk and Scale* and *Section III.C. Architectural Elements and Materials* of the *Draft Marina District Design Guidelines* (MDDGs). The Agency will also discuss their upcoming briefing to City Council that is scheduled for January 28th. No Planning Agency action is required at this meeting; however, policy direction is requested for these sections.

Background

The following background information is intended to track the Planning Agency's progress on the review of the draft Marina District Design Guidelines for the Downtown Neighborhood.

November 2, 2009: The Planning Agency initiated discussion on the draft Marina District Design Guidelines (MDDGs) and confirmed the schedule and process by which the Agency will conduct their review. The Agency confirmed upcoming meeting dates for: November 16th, December 7th, January 4th and January 25th. Leslie Newman was appointed as the Agency representative to provide progress briefings to City Council, with Aaron Bekkerus designated as Alternate 1 and Shan Hoel as Alternate 2. The communications strategy included setting up Des Moines e-mail accounts for the Agency, updating the Planning Agency webpage, authoring articles for City Currents, and public open houses.

November 16, 2009: Councilmember Dave Kaplan, liaison to the Planning Agency, attended the meeting and provided the Council's perspective regarding downtown planning. Staff provided an overview of the process by which the Planning Agency would be reviewing the design guidelines and bringing information to Council via regular briefings. The group discussed the challenges of focusing solely on design guidelines without getting into the realm of downtown planning. Councilmember

Kaplan welcomed input and ideas from the Agency related to downtown planning recognizing that Council is the ultimate decision maker.

Staff gave an overview of the neighborhood context, status of downtown planning, design objectives intended by the MDDGs, and view analysis. Discussion topics included housing and job capacity, economic development, parking, zoning, and building heights.

December 7, 2009: Staff provided an overview of the elements associated with site planning – site characteristics, street compatibility, corner lots, human activity, transition between residences and the street, parking and vehicle access. Leslie Newman narrated a slide show of photographs she had taken from other downtown waterfronts similar to Des Moines – Edmonds, Kirkland, Main Street in Bellevue, Bainbridge Island, La Conner and Poulsbo. Images illustrated storefronts, streetscapes, wayfinding, on-street parking in retail areas, and a mix of uses, building heights and architectural styles. Images of University Village in Seattle were shown to illustrate various streetscape environments such as walkways, plazas, play areas, street furniture, planters and parking.

There was consensus from Agency members that the draft MDDGs are headed in the right direction. It was suggested that photos be added to the MDDGs to provide more examples and to emphasize what the City wants to see.

Agency members expressed a need to figure out where downtown is. Staff referenced previous Council discussions identifying S 223rd as the “heart” of the downtown with access to the Marina and Beach Park and a desire to identify a smaller geographic area/s for focused planning. Staff indicated that heart locations can be used to define geographic areas within the downtown neighborhood:

- Theater Block on Marine View Drive
- Marina & Beach Park
- S 223rd and S 227th Streets (i.e., key pedestrian streets with connections to Marina/Beach Park)

Staff discussed the ability to create change incrementally through targeted public investments in a smaller geographic area, implementing design guidelines, enforcement of sign regulations, getting property owners to clean up their sites, etc. Agency members expressed a desire to identify some things the city can begin to implement to foster change in the downtown (i.e., improve sidewalks, install pedestrian scale lighting, and work with property owners to spruce up buildings).

Agency members identified related topics that require further discussion with Council and staff:

- How to control traffic through Downtown – declassifying SR 509 to a local street, reduce speed limits, add parallel or angle parking along MVD
- How to attract people to the downtown – increased residential densities needed in the downtown for critical mass; need places people want to come to
- Understanding the developer issues and the make/break point for investing in downtown Des Moines – look at feedback from Leadership Summit and developer forums; tools such as tax incentives for good design; use of developer agreements
- Agency members discussed the need to develop an issue paper with related questions and recommendations to Council.

Development Services staff cautioned that design guidelines are not always easy to move forward and can be controversial from a regulatory and property rights perspective. It was recommended that the Agency keep this in mind as they review and recommend changes to the draft MDDGs.

January 4, 2010: At the onset of the meeting, the Agency reaffirmed their direction for completing the review of the MDDGs and confirmed future meetings on **February 8th** and **February 22nd**. Members discussed the challenges of moving forward on the design guidelines without answering some broader questions that cross over into the realm of Downtown planning – what is the vision for the future Downtown, what characteristics should be emphasized, should building heights be changed in some areas, etc. It was agreed that the Agency would prepare an issue paper with recommendations to Council. Preparation for the upcoming briefing to Council on January 28th was also discussed.

The remainder of the meeting focused on text amendments to the Site Planning section of the MDDGs which were incorporated into the draft document as tracked changes. Specific questions/comments related to Site Planning and staff responses are noted below:

Global edit: *Comment* – Reconsider the use of the word “shall” as it equates to less flexibility. *Response* – Staff agrees with this observation. Refer to *page i* of the MDDGs for a list of staff questions for consideration by the Planning Agency in your review of the draft design guidelines.

A.2 Street Compatibility – Relationship to Street, 5th bullet: *Question* – *What is the intent of the guideline:* “The ground floors of buildings should appear inviting to the public by containing commercial uses and public open spaces with direct entry from the sidewalk. Vary in size, width and depth to accommodate a variety of appropriate uses and activities for the site and vicinity. This includes providing multiple entries at the street.” *Response* – This guideline relates to creating an inviting appearance to buildings, providing space for activities such as outdoor dining, and ensuring there are multiple entries to promote/enhance activity at the street level.

A.2 Street Compatibility – Relationship to Street, 12th bullet: *Question* – *Is or shouldn't this detail addressed in the Code?* “In residential projects, front yard fences over four (4) feet in height that reduce visual access and security should be avoided.” *Response* – Currently, this provision is not addressed in the DMMC (*Chapter 18.40.150 Location of wall, fence, or hedge.*); however, it would be most appropriate as part of our regulations with a reference provided in MDDGs.

A.4. Human Activity, 4th bullet: *Comment* – *Add graphic examples of what is desired.* The text reads “Street level transparency. The intention of transparency in the street level facades of commercial and civic buildings is to provide for interaction between people in the interior of a building and people near the exterior of a building - particularly on the sidewalk - through a direct visual connection. The following are examples of less desirable design treatments that are discouraged:

- windowless walls;
- mirrored or non-transparent glass or glass block;
- display cases;
- narrow windows not meeting the intent above;
- windows located above waist level to persons outside the building on the sidewalk;
- windows into areas that are too small, shallow, or narrow to support normal human activity (e.g. the back of a tall display case, a narrow hallway); and
- any interior wall, equipment, or functional layout that hampers the intent of transparency stated above.

Response – Transparency in this context relates to the need to maintain a visual dialogue between the pedestrian outside and the commercial/retail use on the inside. This helps to create interest and activity at the street level. Use of transparent windows and interactive window displays are the primary methods to achieve this. From an architectural perspective, windows are a building’s eyes. The graphics shown on page DG-9 of the MDDGs are intended to illustrate this desired effect. This is supported by the intent statement for *Street level transparency* as quoted above.

Discussion

The homework assignment for the January 25, 2010 meeting is to review *Section III. B. Height, Bulk & Scale* and *Section III.C. Architectural Elements and Materials* of the MDDGs. At this meeting we will discuss the Agency’s recommended edits/additions to these sections and incorporate into the MDDGs as appropriate. The purpose of the Agency’s review is to provide input that *adds value and clarifies the intent* of the MDDGs.

Please be prepared with your edits ahead of the meeting as we want to move through the text editing portion of the discussion as quickly as possible. Submit any questions to staff one week prior to the meeting to allow adequate time to research and respond.

The Planning Agency briefing to City Council on the review progress for the MDDGs is scheduled for **January 28, 2010**. The last half hour of the Planning Agency’s meeting will be reserved for finalizing the presentation and wrap-up.

Section III. B. Height, Bulk & Scale

“Height, bulk and scale” relates to the size of buildings and their relationship to surrounding properties. Architectural design, choice of construction materials, and how the built form sits within the context of its surroundings influence the sense of place. A well designed building should be welcoming, add human interest, and allow opportunities for meaningful social interaction.

The following information excerpted from Seattle’s Design Guidelines provides a good overview of Height, Bulk and Scale issues. Given the direct correlation to architectural design and consistency discussed in *Section III.C. Architectural Elements and Materials* of the MDDGs, background information on this topic is also provided.

Compatibility

Projects should be compatible with the scale of development anticipated by the land use policies and zoning for the surrounding area and should be sited and designed to provide a sensitive transition to nearby, less intensive zones as well as the pedestrian environment. Careful siting and design treatment based on the techniques described in the MDDGs are intended help to mitigate some height, bulk and scale impacts.

Factors to consider in analyzing potential height, bulk and scale impacts include:

- Distance from the edge of a less intensive zone (e.g., between D-C zone and RM-900, RM-900A and RS-8400 zones).
- Differences in development standards between abutting zones (allowable building height, width, lot coverage, etc.).

- Effect of site size and shape.
- Height, bulk and scale relationships resulting from lot orientation (e.g. back lot line to back lot line vs. back lot line to side lot line).
- Type and amount of separation between lots in the different zones (e.g. separation by only a property line, by an alley or street, or by other physical features such as grade changes).

In some cases, careful siting and design treatment may be sufficient to achieve reasonable transition and mitigation of height, bulk and scale impacts. Some techniques for achieving compatibility are as follows:

- Use of architectural style, details (such as roof lines or the arrangement of windows in a building), color or materials that derive from the less intensive zone. (see Guideline C-1: Architectural Context.)
- Creative use of landscaping or other screening.
- Location of features on-site to facilitate transition, such as locating required open space on the zone edge so the building is farther from the lower intensity zone.
- Treating topographic conditions in ways that minimize impacts on neighboring development, such as by using a rockery rather than a retaining wall to give a more human scale to a project, or stepping a project down a hillside.
- In a mixed-use project, siting the more compatible use near the zone edge.

In some cases, reductions in the actual height, bulk and scale of the proposed structure may be necessary in order to mitigate adverse impacts and achieve an acceptable level of compatibility. This is typically addressed by the underlying development regulations. Some techniques that can be used in these cases include:

- articulating the building's facades vertically or horizontally in intervals that conform to existing structures or platting pattern
- increasing building setbacks from the zone edge at ground level
- Reducing the bulk of the building's upper floors
- limiting the length of, or otherwise modifying, facades
- reducing the height of the structure
- reducing the number or size of accessory structures

Section III.C. Architectural Elements and Materials

“Architectural Elements and Materials” are the unique details and components that together, form the “architectural style” of buildings and structures. New buildings proposed for existing neighborhoods with a well-defined and desirable character should be compatible with or complement the architectural character and siting pattern of neighboring buildings.

Architectural Context

Paying attention to architectural characteristics of surrounding buildings, especially historic buildings, can help new buildings be more compatible with their neighbors, especially if a consistent pattern is already established by similar:

- building articulation

- building scale and proportion
- or complementary architectural style
- or complementary roof forms
- building details and fenestration patterns
- or complementary materials

Even where there is no consistent architectural pattern, building design and massing can be used to complement certain physical conditions of existing development.

In some cases, the existing context is not so well-defined, or may be undesirable. In such cases, a well-designed new project can become a pioneer with the opportunity to establish a pattern or identity from which future development can take its cues.

Architectural Features

Below are several methods that can help integrate new buildings into the surrounding architectural context, using compatible:

- architectural features
- fenestration patterns (i.e., arrangement of windows), and
- building proportions.

Building Articulation

Below are several methods in which buildings may be articulated to create intervals which reflect and promote compatibility with their surroundings:

- modulating the facade by stepping back or extending forward a portion of the facade
- repeating the window patterns at an interval that equals the articulation interval
- providing a porch, patio, deck or covered entry for each interval
- providing a balcony or bay window for each interval
- changing the roofline by alternating dormers, stepped roofs, gables or other roof elements to reinforce the modulation or articulation interval (note: most roofs in the Downtown are flat)
- changing the materials with a change in the building plane
- providing a lighting fixture, trellis, tree or other landscape feature with each interval

Financial Impact

Design guidelines can establish a climate for investment for businesses, residents and property owners because the associated review process provides assurance that alterations and new construction by others will reinforce the design goals and vision for the neighborhood. Revitalization of the Downtown/Marina District will stimulate economic development in the business core. This in turn will help to create jobs, new housing, a stronger tax base and tax revenues for the City of Des Moines.