

AGENDA ITEM

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: February 8, 2010

DEPT. OF ORIGIN: Planning, Building & Public Works

DATE SUBMITTED: February 1, 2010

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*, *Section III.C. Architectural Elements and Materials* and *Section D. Pedestrian Environment* of the *Draft Marina District Design Guidelines* (MDDGs). 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.

January 25, 2010: Staff presented information and answered Agency member's questions on *Section III. B. Height, Bulk & Scale* and *Section III.C. Architectural Elements and Materials*. The Agency discussed their January 28th briefing to Council on the Agency's review progress on the MDDGs.

Discussion

The homework assignment for the February 8, 2010 meeting is to review *Section D. Pedestrian Environment* of the MDDGs. At this meeting we will discuss the Agency's recommended edits/additions to this section as well as the previously discussed sections on *Height, Bulk & Scale* and *Architectural Elements and Materials* 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 D. Pedestrian Environment

The Pedestrian Environment relates to how buildings and associated site improvements can be designed in a manner that encourages walking, biking and transit use. Pedestrian facilities and amenities provide a variety of areas to accommodate shoppers, residents, employees and Visitors.

Within the Marina District, a portion of the required open space should be designed as pedestrian-oriented space, particularly along designated pedestrian streets. Bicycle and pedestrian features should also be considered whenever roadway or other capital improvements are considered.

For the purpose of the MDDGs, the pedestrian environment is categorized into the following topic areas: pedestrian open spaces and entrances, blank walls, design of parking near sidewalks, visual impact of parking structures, screening of dumpsters, utilities and service areas, and personal safety and security. Note that additional examples are included beyond what is contained in the Draft MDDGs.

D.1. Pedestrian Open Spaces and Entrances

In business districts where pedestrian activity is desired, the open space between buildings and the sidewalk can provide visual and physical access into the building and, where possible, a space for additional outdoor activities such as vending, resting, sitting or dining. If a building is set back from the sidewalk, the space between the building and public right-of-way may be conducive to pedestrian or resident activity. Street fronts can also feature artwork, street furniture and landscaping that invite customers or enhance the building's setting. Examples of desirable features to include:

- visual and pedestrian access (including barrier-free access) into the site from the public sidewalk;
- walking surfaces made from attractive pavers;
- pedestrian-scaled site lighting;
- spaces for vendors in commercial areas;
- landscaping that screens undesirable elements or that enhances the space and architecture;
- signage that identifies uses and shops clearly but which is scaled to the pedestrian; and
- site furniture, artwork or amenities such as fountains, benches, pergolas, kiosks, etc.

D.2. Blank Walls (intent and guidelines from PRDG)

Buildings should avoid large blank walls facing the street, especially near sidewalks. A wall may be considered "large" if it has a blank surface substantially greater in size than similar walls of neighboring buildings. Blank walls also provide opportunities for defacement with graffiti.

Where blank walls are unavoidable they should receive design treatment to increase pedestrian comfort and interest. Following are some methods to reduce the visual impact of blank walls by providing visual interest:

- installing vertical trellis in front of the wall with climbing vines or plants materials;
- setting the wall back and providing a landscaped or raised planter bed in front of the wall, including plant materials that can grow to obscure or screen the wall's surface;
- providing art (mosaic, mural, decorative masonry pattern, sculpture, relief, etc.) over a substantial portion of the blank wall surface;
- employing small setbacks, indentations, or other means of breaking up the wall's surface; and
- providing special lighting, a canopy, horizontal trellis or other pedestrian-oriented features that break up the size of the blank wall's surface and add visual interest.

D.3. Design of Parking Near Sidewalks

Parking lot design typically focuses on accommodating vehicle movements, maximizing the number of parking spaces, and ensuring ease of maintenance and servicing. When functional requirements are the only objectives considered in parking lot design, the design outcome is generally undesirable, with poor quality landscaping, unattractive streetscapes and a lack of pedestrian safety, comfort and amenity. This often results in few landscaped areas within a parking lot that tend to be insufficient in size and design to support healthy trees and vegetation. Pedestrians are also given low priority and may be left to navigate between parked cars and across wide driveways, which presents safety concerns.

To avoid such negative outcomes, parking lots near sidewalks should be designed to provide adequate security and lighting, avoid encroachment of vehicles onto the sidewalk, and minimize the visual clutter of parking lot signs and equipment. The following examples illustrate some methods to improve the appearance of at-grade parking lots:

Treatment of parking area perimeter - the edges of parking lots pavement adjacent to landscaped areas and other pavement can be unsightly and difficult to maintain. Providing a curb at the perimeter of parking areas can alleviate these problems.

Security lighting – providing the appropriate levels of lighting helps improve visibility at night. Evenly distributed lighting increases security, and glare-free lighting reduces impacts on nearby property.

Encroachment of cars onto the sidewalk – without tire bumpers or a low wall, parked cars can hang over sidewalks. One technique to protect landscaped and pedestrian areas from encroachment by parked cars is to provide a wide wheel stop about two feet from the sidewalk. A preferable technique is to install an extended curb, which is more durable than wheel stops and does not catch debris.

Signs and equipment – sign clutter can be reduced by painting markings on the pavement or by consolidating signs. Locating storage areas out of view from the sidewalk and adjacent properties for moveable or temporary equipment also reduces visual clutter.

Screening of parking – screening of parking areas should be designed to provide clear visibility into parking areas and promote personal safety. The screening type and amount will vary depending upon the adjacent uses. For example, screen walls across a street or adjacent to a residential zone could include landscaping or a trellis or grillwork with climbing vines.

D.4. Visual Impact of Parking Structures (optional guidelines from PRDG)

Parking structures or accessory parking garages should be architecturally compatible with the rest of the structure and streetscape. For example, providing retail uses or incorporating pedestrian-oriented uses at street level can reduce the visual impact of parking structures in commercial areas. Sometimes a depth of only 10 feet along the front of the building is enough to provide space for newsstands, ticket booths, flower shops and other viable uses. Other methods of improving the appearance of at-grade parking structures include:

- setting the parking structure back from the sidewalk and installing dense landscaping;
- incorporating any of the blank wall treatments;
- visually integrating the parking structure with adjacent buildings;
- continuing a frieze, cornice, canopy, overhang, trellis or other devices at the top of the parking level; and
- incorporating into the parking structure a well-lit pedestrian walkway, stairway or ramp from the sidewalk to the upper level of the building.

D.5. Screening of Dumpsters, Utilities and Service Areas (guidelines from PRDG)

Unsightly service elements can detract from the compatibility of new projects and create hazards for pedestrians and autos. When elements such as dumpsters, utility meters, mechanical units and service areas cannot be located away from the street front, they should be situated and screened from view and should not be located in the pedestrian right-of-way. The following examples illustrate considerations to address in locating and screening service areas and utilities:

- plan the feature in a less visible location on the site;
- screen it to be less visible. For example, a utility meter can be located behind a screen wall so that it is not visible from the building entrance;
- use durable materials that complement the building;
- incorporate landscaping to make the screen more effective; and

- locate the opening to the area away from the sidewalk.

D.6. Personal Safety and Security

Project design should consider opportunities for enhancing personal safety and security. To do this, the question needs to be answered: *Do the design elements detract from or do they reinforce feelings of security of the residents, workers, shoppers and visitors who enter the area?*

Techniques that can help promote safety are commonly referred to as “Crime Prevention through Environmental Design” or “CPTED” and include:

- providing adequate lighting;
- retaining clear lines of site;
- use of semi-transparent security screening, rather than opaque walls, where appropriate;
- avoiding blank, windowless walls that attract graffiti and that do not permit residents or workers to observe the street;
- use of landscaping that maintains visibility, such as short shrubs and pruning trees, so there are no branches below head height;
- creative use of ornamental grille as fencing or over ground floor windows in some locations;
- absence of structures that provide hiding places for criminal activity;
- design of parking areas to allow natural surveillance by maintaining clear lines of sight both for those who park there and for occupants of nearby buildings;
- clear directional signage;
- encouraging "eyes on the street" through placement of windows, balconies and street-level uses; and
- ensuring natural surveillance of children's play areas.

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.