

AGENDA ITEM

BUSINESS OF THE PLANNING AGENCY City of Des Moines, WA

SUBJECT: Marina District Design Guidelines

1. Section III.E. Landscape Design
2. Section III.F. Signs

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

FOR AGENDA OF: February 22, 2010

DEPT. OF ORIGIN: Planning, Building & Public Works

DATE SUBMITTED: February 17, 2010

CLEARANCES:

PB &PW DIRECTOR: GF

Purpose and Recommendation

The purpose of this agenda item is to solicit Agency member comments on the *Section III.E. Landscape Design* and *Section III.F. Signs* 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.

February 8, 2010: At the onset of the meeting, the Agency discussed the February 4th Council briefing and confirmed future meetings on **March 8th** and **March 22nd**. The Agency set the date for the public open house on **March 22nd**. Leslie Newman suggested a potential off-site location for the open house and volunteered to contact the property owner to confirm. The date and location were subsequently confirmed.

The Agency completed their review and discussion of the MDDG sections on *Section III.B. Height, Bulk and Scale*, *Section III.C. Architectural Elements and Materials* and *Section D. Pedestrian Environment*. In addition to text edits, general comments noted include:

- Be consistent with the "Intent" statements (global edit)
- Avoid being too prescriptive and rely on development regulations for specified limitations
- Architectural Context - Need to clarify whether we're preserving or moving into future...

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Agency requested that staff to provide a revised document for their review in early March. Staff indicated that this would be most appropriate once the initial review of the all sections is complete.

Discussion

The homework assignment for the February 22, 2010 meeting is to review *Section III.E. Landscape Design* and *Section III.F. Signs* 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.

Section III.E. Landscape Design

Landscape design guidelines are intended to help create environments that are functional, purposeful, and aesthetically pleasing and contribute to the design continuity of an area. They are intended to help unite the design of structures and places with the natural environment and discuss concepts behind new landscaping as well as the maintenance and protection of existing natural features.

A primary goal stated in the Marina District's Vision Statement is to "*enhance the image of Des Moines as a special Puget Sound waterfront community.*" Besides its excellent waterfront, an important natural feature of the Marina District is its bowl-shaped topography which provides views from surrounding neighborhoods down toward the district. The valley topography also helps to define the downtown's

edges and facilitates the transition from largely commercial activities in the valley floor to the mostly residential areas in the uplands. The Marina, Beach Park and waterfront provide a naturalizing function.

Much of the Landscape Design section comes from the Pacific Ridge Design Guidelines (PRDGs); however, the content has been reorganized to address three components as shown below.

- E.1. Landscape Character for the Marina District
- E.2. Landscape Design to Enhance the Building and/or Site
- E.3. Landscape Design to Address Special Site Conditions (from PRDGs)

Although not a component of PRDGs, *Section E.1. Landscape Character* provides an opportunity to define the physical characteristics of the desired landscape for the Downtown/Marina District. Keeping this in mind, the landscape design should consider the unique qualities, and common built and natural aesthetic characteristics of a project's surroundings. Listed below are some examples of how to reinforce the landscape design character of a neighborhood; noting that these could be desired characteristics given they currently do not exist in the downtown:

- Street Trees: If a street has a uniform planting of street trees, or a distinctive species, plant street trees that match the planting pattern or species.
- Similar Plant Materials: When many lots on a block feature similar landscape materials, emphasis on these materials will help a new project fit into the local context.

Section E.2. Landscape Design to Enhance the Building and/or Site describes how landscaping can be used to enhance the design of buildings and help create a more seamless interface between the building and its surroundings.

Section E.3. Landscape Design to Address Special Site Conditions (from PRDG) is intended to identify landscape design concepts for dealing with unique site conditions such as slopes, view corridors, and adjacent natural areas.

Section III.F. Signs

The purpose of sign guidelines is to help create a positive visual appearance within the Downtown/Marina District and establish reasonable and improved standards for business identification. They are intended to be used in conjunction with development regulations that address the use, placement, physical dimensions, and design of commercial signs within the Downtown by:

- Promoting the objectives of the Downtown Vision Statement
- Assisting property and business owners in understanding city expectations
- Encouraging creative approaches to sign design
- Enhancing overall property values and the visual environment in the city by discouraging clutter
- Promoting a high quality Commercial District by allowing signs that are compatible with their surroundings and which effectively communicate their message.

Signage that is designed within the context of the architectural and open space concept and coordinated with façade design details, lighting, and other project features can visually and functionally complement a project. Exterior signs that are appropriate in scale can add interest to the street environment and express a desired character for the neighborhood.

The choice of materials and detail has a great impact on how well a design concept is articulated and implemented. Sign designs that are well executed using quality materials will help a project stand the test of time—both stylistically and materially—and become a valued asset to the community.

The best signs are designed well enough to attract business, while at the same time enhancing the area where they are meant to work. An effective sign is one that:

1. Attracts New Customers
2. Brands in the Minds of Consumers
3. Creates Impulse Sales
4. Helps a Mobile Society
5. Aids Traffic Safety
6. Enhances the Look of a Community

While every business is different, sign industry research indicates that the *return on investment* for signs is good. Research from the U.S. Small Business Administration and the Signage Foundation for Communication Excellence, Inc., found that:

- Business signage has a value that can far exceed the construction cost of the sign itself.
- The most cost-effective and efficient form of advertising to potential customers is via on-premise signage.
- More than 50 percent of customers first learn about small businesses by their signs.
- On-premise signage is the best use of a company's advertising dollars, and is the only way to capture impulse sales.
- Signs can help consumers remember the business's location, products and services; prompt purchases; change consumers' purchase decisions or habits and build brand equity.
- For the small, independent merchant, signs are the most effective form of advertising.

The sign guidelines presented in the MDDGs provide some overarching goals then offer specific examples for dealing with elements such as corner lots, awnings, canopies, and storefronts. Examples are intended to articulate the types of signage the City desires for the Downtown/Marina District as well as signage that is discouraged. Both photographs and sketches are used to help the user understand how they can best adapt their business signage to their site conditions.

Ultimately, the sign guidelines necessitate changes to the Sign Code (Chapter 18.42 DMMC). To better effectuate the intent of the sign guidelines and code, the City may also want to consider establishing a program to remove inadequately maintained, illegal and nonconforming signs within a reasonable time period.

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.