

AGENDA ITEM

BUSINESS OF THE PLANNING AGENCY City of Des Moines, WA

SUBJECT: Marina District Design Guidelines

FOR AGENDA OF: March 8, 2010

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

DEPT. OF ORIGIN: Planning, Building & Public Works

DATE SUBMITTED: March 3, 2010

CLEARANCES:

PB &PW DIRECTOR: GF

Purpose and Recommendation

The purpose of this agenda item is to solicit additional comments on the 2nd Draft of the Marina District Design Guidelines (MDDGs) that reflect the Planning Agency's input to date, and to discuss the upcoming open house scheduled for March 22, 2010. Planning Agency policy direction is requested for these items.

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.

February 22, 2010: The Planning Agency completed their review of Section III.E. Landscape Design and Section III.F. Signs of the MDDGs and discussed the format and objectives of the March 22nd open house.

Discussion of the *Landscape Design* guidelines addressed the relationship between the design of structures with the natural environment such as the waterfront and Beach Park. Concepts behind new landscaping as well as the need to maintain and protect existing natural features were also discussed. Images of landscaping design in urban areas were shown to provide context for the discussion of landscape design for development sites, public right-of-way and environmental sustainability. The Agency expressed the need to define what we mean by “sustainable” and asked staff to confirm CPTED landscape principles for safety.

The discussion of *Sign* guidelines focused on overarching goals of good design of signs followed by specific examples for dealing with elements such as corner lots, awnings, canopies, and storefronts. Methods for illustrating types of signage the City desires and/or discourages in the Marina District were also discussed. The Agency recommended the *Signs* section be simplified. The use of graphic sketches was seen as a good method to demonstrate what is desired, rather than specific statements of what is “encouraged” versus “discouraged.”

It was agreed that the proposed sign guidelines would likely necessitate changes to the Sign Code (Chapter 18.42 DMMC). The Agency also discussed the need to establishing a program or mechanism to remove

inadequately maintained, illegal and nonconforming signs within a reasonable time period to better effectuate the intent of the sign guidelines and code.

Discussion

The homework assignment for the March 8, 2010 meeting is to review the revised draft of the MDDGs and provide any additional edits. At this meeting we will discuss additional edits 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. The intent is to post a clean draft on the City's website to provide an opportunity for citizens to review the document prior to the March 22, 2010 open house.

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.