

AGENDA ITEM

BUSINESS OF THE PLANNING AGENCY City of Des Moines, WA

SUBJECT: Marina District Design Guidelines –
Site Planning

Bring Your Design Guidelines to the Meeting

ATTACHMENTS:

FOR AGENDA OF: December 7, 2009

DEPT. OF ORIGIN: Planning, Building & Public
Works

DATE SUBMITTED: November 25, 2009

CLEARANCES:

PB &PW DIRECTOR: _____

Purpose and Recommendation

The purpose of this agenda item is to discuss the Site Planning section of the Draft Marina District Design Guidelines (MDDGs). No Planning Agency action is required at this meeting; however, policy direction is requested regarding the Site Planning section.

Background

The following 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. A summary of the meeting is provided as Attachment 1. 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.

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.

Discussion

Site Planning involves the organization of buildings, landscaping, open spaces, circulation and other features on a site. It addresses the relationship of a site to its surrounding environment through:

- Site Characteristics
- Street Compatibility
- Corner Lots
- Human Activity
- Transition between Residences and the Street
- Parking and Vehicle Access

Site Characteristics: A development site can be characterized by its location, unusual topography, climatic factors such as sun, shade and prevailing wind patterns, significant vegetation and views, or other natural features. These characteristics can affect how a structure is designed for or placed on the site and how the site relates to its surroundings. The siting of buildings should respond to specific site conditions and opportunities. For example, a site located on a prominent corner can provide an opportunity to establish a gateway or heart location in an area. This objective can be achieved through use of architectural elements, streetscape features, landscaping and signage and/or by providing areas for social activity or opportunities for public views of Puget Sound, Olympic Mountains and cityscapes.

Street Compatibility: The character of a neighborhood is often defined by the experience of walking along its streets. How buildings meet the sidewalk will determine the character, scale and function of the streetscape. A pedestrian-oriented streetscape is perhaps the most important characteristic to be achieved by new development/redevelopment in the Downtown Neighborhood. New development – particularly on Marine View Drive, S 223rd and S 227th Streets – will set the precedent in establishing desirable siting and design characteristics in the right-of-way. To achieve this objective, the siting of a new building should reinforce the desired spatial characteristics of the streetscapes.

Corner Lots: Pedestrian activities are concentrated at street corners. These are places of convergence, where people wait to cross the street and are most likely to converse with others. New development on corner lots should take advantage of this condition, adding interest to the street while providing clear space for movement. Des Moines small-scale blocks provide numerous opportunities for special corner treatments. Prominent building entries and landscaped courtyards can create interesting focal points on corner lots. To achieve this objective, buildings on corner lots should be oriented to the corner and street fronts with the parking and automobile access located away from the corners.

Human Activity: Mixed-use commercial areas can be among the liveliest pedestrian environments in a city. The mix of storefronts that house retail, restaurants, and services attract residents and visitors on a daily basis. Proper site planning helps reinforce the pedestrian orientation of a neighborhood. To achieve this objective, new development should be sited and designed to encourage human activity on the street.

Transition between Residences and the Street: For residential projects, the space between the building and the sidewalk should provide security and privacy for residents and encourage social interaction among residents and neighbors. Ways to achieve this objective include setting back and elevating residential entries from the street and use of landscaping to create a transition between the public and private areas and enhance the streetscape – fences over 4 feet high are typically discouraged. In residential projects, except townhouses, it is preferable to have one walkway from the street that can serve several building entrances. Similarly, for projects where a courtyard is proposed, there should be at least one entry from the street.

Parking and Vehicle Access: The placement of parking and vehicle access is critical for creating a pedestrian oriented environment. Siting should minimize the impact of automobile parking and driveways on the pedestrian environment, adjacent properties and pedestrian safety. Methods include limiting curb cuts and consolidating park access for multiple uses.

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 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.