

**Ann Arbor Discovering Downtown  
Urban Design Guidelines Advisory Committee**

April 19th, 2006 Meeting  
6<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room, City Hall

Members Present: Kurt Brandle, Christine Crockett, Ron Emaus, Eric Lipson, Alice Ralph

Staff Present: Wendy Rampson, Coy Vaughn, Lindsay-Jean Hard

Guests: Ray Detter (Citizen's Advisory Council), Ethel Potts (Planning Commission)

**"Propose the means to achieve desirable placemaking through predictable process  
that results in consistently high-quality outcomes."**

1. Character Area Homework

Staff noted that committee members would use this time to review their homework, which was to consider character areas in the downtown, through mapping and photographing. Members commented that they'd taken a lot of photos, and would like them to be available and readily accessible to everyone. Staff will work on a website to post the information so it is available to the entire committee.

One committee member requested that the second public workshop be rescheduled, as currently it is scheduled during Art Fair week. Staff noted that the conflict would be addressed with the consultants. A member questioned whether a summary of the conference call was available, staff noted that the consultants had e-mailed it that morning, and added that it would be available to the committee after staff had had a chance to review it.

Staff reported that one member who was not able to attend today felt that the historic districts acted as character areas, but that outside of that, the downtown was a mix, and did not have distinct character areas. One member felt that it wasn't just the historic districts, but also the edges of neighborhoods and how they relate to downtown, suggesting that there should be a focus on the relationships between areas. Another member fell more in line with the first comment, noting that as an outsider to downtown, downtown is all downtown, even if one can find areas that have a different feeling to them or that people like or dislike.

A member remarked that they really are different neighborhoods within the downtown, each of which has different types of services, shops, and restaurants, which then dictates the character of the area. One member noted that there are historic pieces all over the downtown, and expressed a preference to hold off on this discussion until the originator of the comment was present. A member expressed a belief that there is a category between 'historic' and 'other.' Another member noted that the committee also has to deal with how new construction will relate to historic districts. One member commented that they thought members were trying to figure out what shape the area is, and added that it might not fit neatly with the DDA boundary or the study boundary. The member added that the relationship between areas is important.

A member felt that historic districts were the areas with the most character, but felt that other areas like Main Street and Fourth Avenue had character too. The member was willing to regulate outside of the historic districts, but not in terms of architectural details like material choice. The member noted that cutting edge architecture is controversial, and did not want to regulate that. The member felt that architects have the right to build ugly buildings, and added that their concern was the impact on the street. Another member noted that architectural

details can impact the ecology of the building as well as the quality of life of the occupants. One member noted that the group is discussing urban design guidelines, not building design guidelines.

A member noted that in areas where a character is not well defined, that in and of itself is a character. The member added that character can be functional as well, and gave the example of Huron Street, where the character is dominated by traffic. Another member gave the example of their residential street, which has a nice mix of many different styles. The member added that the discussion of design is not a discussion on style, it's a discussion about greenspace, sustainability, entry articulation, setbacks, and how to create and sustain quality of life. The member also noted that there are certainly areas with different character, like Kerrytown, which is made up of old warehouses.

One member distributed a diagram which documents where photographs were taken and in which direction along Huron Street, and then proceeded to go through a slide show of these photographs. A member of the audience commented that one of Calthorpe's mistakes was to say that Huron Street has one character, when these pictures clearly show otherwise.

Another member began a slide show of photographs documenting much of the downtown, and began with a discussion of a necessary back setback on Huron. The member noted that building to the rear lot line would have a negative impact on the adjacent historic neighborhood, in terms of quality of life and their access to light and air, and further stressed that neighborhood edges need to be addressed.

One member noted that views along corridors are important to keep in mind, especially the view of UM's Burton Tower. Another member noted there is already a site plan approved that would block that vista from the west along Liberty Street. Other contributors to character include difference in topography, especially along the west end of downtown.

A committee member asked what the group whether it was looking to identify an "experience" that defines a character area. One member responded that the mission of the DGAC is about placemaking – to have places that attract people and activity. The goal is to look at enhancing what's in place. Transitions between areas may be a component of that.

Another noted that there may be areas that need to be looked at to correct their character, or lack thereof. This may entail looking at sites that are being developed, or under consideration for development. These areas could be characterized as "opportunity areas."

A member suggested that the photos provided by committee members be linked with descriptions of character areas.

## 2. Public Comment

There was no formal comment.

## 3. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be a conference call with the consultants on March 30<sup>th</sup>, at 4pm, in the 6<sup>th</sup> floor conference room of City Hall.

Prepared by Lindsay-Jean Hard and Wendy Rampson