

Meeting with Design Advisory Committee & City Staff

Monday April 30, 4:00 p.m. EDT

The Downtown Ann Arbor Design Advisory Committee, Ann Arbor city staff and the Downtown Ann Arbor Design Framework and Guidelines consultant team held a conference call to discuss the results of the advisory committee's design character area exercise and the draft agenda for the first community workshop. Conference call participants included:

Design Advisory Committee

- Christine Crockett
- Kurt Brandle
- Joan Lowenstein
- Ethel Potts
- Alice Ralph

City Staff

- Wendy Rampson
- Coy Vaughn
- Lindsay-Jean Hard

Consultant Team

- Bruce Race
- Nore Winter
- Abe Barge
- Julie Husband

Meeting Summary

Prior email correspondence and meeting discussion focused on several key topics:

- Strategies for June 18 recommendation on design guidelines
- Agenda for the first community workshop
- Consultant-committee collaboration
- Project approach and design concepts

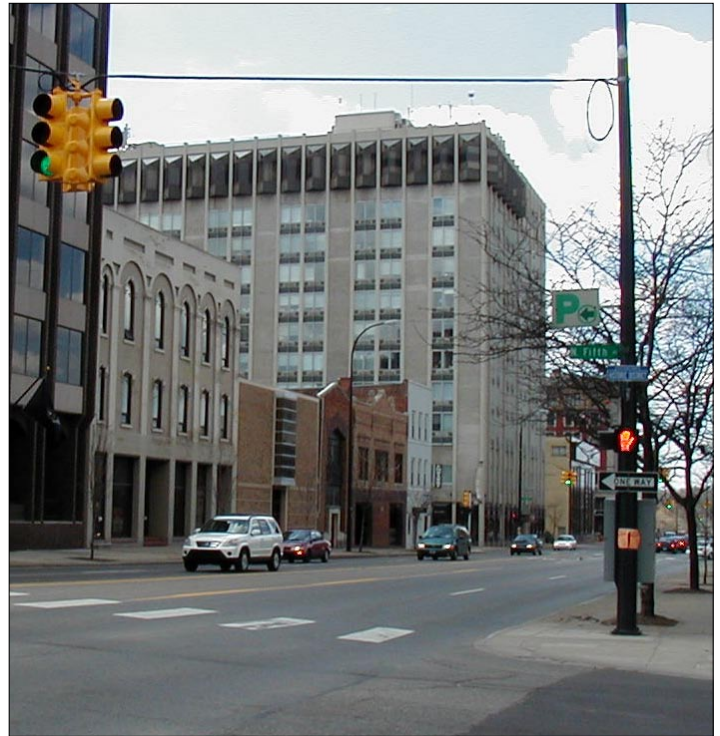


Image credit: Kurt Brandle

Strategies for June 18 City Council Recommendation on Design Guidelines

Wendy Rampson reported that the A2D2 Steering Committee has requested the first phase of the project explore whether or not a design review process should be implemented. As a result, a firm recommendation on whether to pursue design guidelines is desired for the June 18 City Council session.

Kurt Brandle said that he feels that recent push back on the need for design guidelines may be the result of a lack of understanding about the forms the guidelines could take. He and Alice Ralph said that the members of the local AIA chapter may be reluctant about the prospect of mandatory design guidelines but generally agree that some action is needed.



Image credit: Alice Ralph

Christine Crockett said that any question regarding the need for design guidelines should begin with a discussion on what the community itself would like to be. Bruce Race provided a number of basic questions that he feels should be answered by the community before specific recommendations on design guidelines can be made:

- How can the existing experience of downtown be characterized?
- What type of experience is desired for downtown?
- Who holds responsibility for shaping downtown?
- What is part of the zoning project vs. part of the design framework and guidelines project?
- What are the goals and priorities for differing contexts throughout downtown?
- Should projects reflect their architectural context and the desired character for the street/district?
- What level of detail should be addressed?

Noré Winter provided further information on possible application of regulatory tools that could be used once design objectives have been established for downtown Ann Arbor. He described three possible combinations of tools that could be used depending on the ultimate design objectives:

- Inclusion of prescriptive form based standards in the municipal code - no design guidelines. Standards could apply by character area or corridor overlay for increased sensitivity
- Inclusion of prescriptive form based standards in the municipal code with an alternative design review option for increased flexibility
- Inclusion of general form based standards in the municipal code with additional design guidelines applied by character area or corridor overlay

If design guidelines are used, they would be part of a design review process that could take several forms:

- No design review required with guidelines used for education/advocacy only
- Design review required without mandatory compliance
- Design review with approval required if specific thresholds are crossed (FAR, height, historic district adjacency, etc.)
- Design review with approval required for all projects.

The consultant team will prepare a document providing a more detailed description of regulatory tools that could be used.

Feedback received at the first community workshop will inform preliminary design objectives that should help define the range of regulatory tools that will be appropriate. It was suggested that the workshop exercises include a matrix to gather feedback on how qualitative objectives for downtown Ann Arbor could best be met.

Subsequent to the first community workshop, the consultant team will prepare a strategy paper to include a list of recommended options for further consideration. These options should inform the recommendations that are made to City Council on June 18.

Agenda for the First Community Workshop

Prior to the meeting, Bruce Race provided a draft agenda for the first community workshop scheduled for the evening of May 30 (approx. 6:00-9:00 p.m.) A committee member accurately summarized the workshop components as:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be?
- How do we get there? (preliminary discussion)

Mr. Race discussed the need to keep the workshop focused on design objectives rather than on alternative design review systems. There was some discussion, however, of providing handouts or sample guidelines and standards that could be reviewed by participants. It was also suggested that the final workshop exercise include a “what are the best tools to accomplish the objectives?” bonus question. This question could use the objectives/tools matrix described earlier.

The workshop will be held in the Courthouse Square Ballroom.

Consultant-Committee Collaboration

Bruce Race discussed a number of on-site meetings that he would like to organize to facilitate collaboration between the committee and the consultant team.

Meeting #1 (May 25 - Morning): Advisory Committee and Bruce Race

- Review planning purpose and process
- Define urban design character areas map
- Discuss urban design analysis

Meeting #2 (May 30 - Afternoon): Advisory Committee and Consultant Team

- Review workshop urban design analysis slide show
- Discuss Committee’s workshop roles and responsibilities

Meeting #3 (May 31 - Evening): Steering Committee, Advisory Committees and Consultant Team

- Identify overall emerging policy themes and opportunities for downtown
- Review potential planning policy and regulatory approaches
- Discuss coordination between parallel projects

Meeting #3 could be scheduled to follow the 3:00-5:00 p.m. A2D2 Steering Committee meeting in which status updates will be provided for each parallel implementation project. The meeting would provide an opportunity for the consultant to answer questions for the steering committee and discuss coordination with parallel projects.

Project Approach and Design Concepts

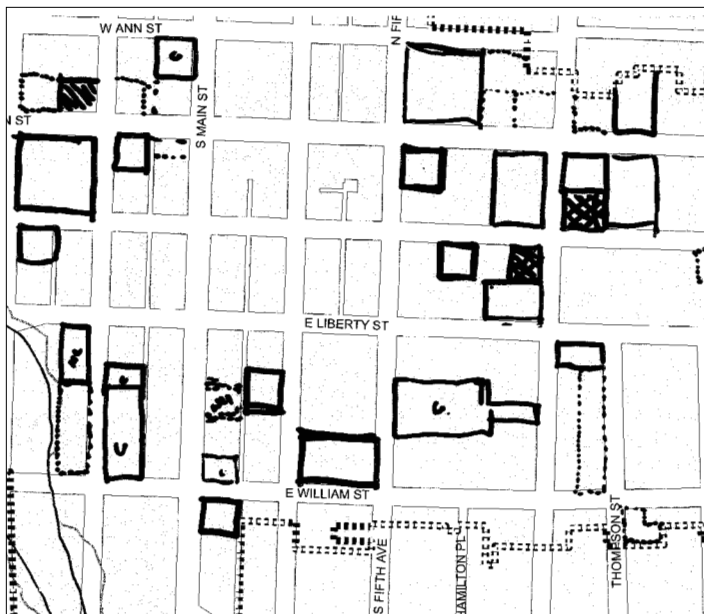
The meeting included discussion of design concepts and character areas that should inform the overall project approach and the first community workshop. Several committee members provided ideas, comments, photographs and maps prior to the meeting. Additional discussion focused on project terminology, project focus, implementation and design subareas.

Project Terminology. Some committee members had suggestions for terminology that could be used to accurately describe the project and its objectives. There was some concern that the term “character area” may result in a focus on architectural features. “Experience,” “opportunities and strategies” and “context” were suggested as terms that could be used to guide the discussion regarding subareas within downtown Ann Arbor.

Project Focus. Kurt Brandle and Joan Lowenstein discussed the need for the project to be grounded in reality. Mr. Brandle suggested that the project focus on potential development at particular sites that are likely to develop rather than on overall character areas.

Implementation Approach. The need for a better understanding of the available implementation tools was discussed. Suggestions included:

- Provide sample design guidelines from other cities
- Show specific problems that have been solved with design guidelines



The need to build consensus behind the recommended implementation approach was also discussed. City Council members, architects, business owners and others will have to be involved to ensure that they understand and support the project recommendations. Noré Winter explained that design guidelines can create a climate for investment in the downtown that will be well-received by developers. He noted that the design guidelines for Boulder, Colorado have significantly elevated the developers’ expectations.

Opportunity Areas and Design Subareas. Suggested opportunity areas where future design will be important included:

- Main Street
- Huron Street (west entry)
- South of University area
- Opportunity sites identified in Policy Framework

Noré Winter suggested that the consultant team prepare a draft diagram showing character areas and corridors that could be used to generate further discussion with the advisory committee.

Next Steps

Steps to occur prior to the first community workshop include:

- Scheduling of specific meetings and times during the consultant team’s on-site visit
- A follow-up conference call to provide further opportunity for the advisory committee to discuss design concepts with the consultant team using a draft map of character areas
- A draft paper outlining potential implementation tools to be developed by the consultant team
- Additional photos and character area narrative should be uploaded to the Winter site for compilation

Advisory committee member Brad Moore prepared a map of opportunity sites near the center of downtown Ann Arbor.