

A2D2 Design Guidelines Community Open House Meeting Summary and Notes

7:00 pm – 9:00 pm
September 2nd, 2009
Kerrytown Concert House
415 N. 4th Ave.

Staff Present: Alexis DiLeo, Wendy Rampson, Matt Kowalski, Ethan Miller (intern), Abe Barge (Winter and Co), and Amber Miller (DDA)

Steering Committee members present:

Roger Hewitt, Ann Arbor DDA
Evan Pratt, City Planning Commission

Approximately 50 members of the public in attendance

Meeting Summary:

The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the revised copy of the Design Guidelines to the public through a brief presentation followed by a walk around viewing of the design guidelines display. Audience members voiced that they had more questions and rather than walk around and look at the design guidelines, they would prefer to continue in a Q & A style after the presentation. The majority of the comments centered around audience member's frustration with the voluntary application of the design guidelines. Some people felt strongly that such guidelines should be mandatory, others voiced that they expected at least an advisory level of review. In addition, some audience members felt that this process was moving too quickly and that the public was being left out. Comments directed specifically at the content of the design guidelines focused on sustainability and graphics, and one audience member noted that this was a much more clear and concise version than previous drafts.

Welcome: 7:00 – 7:30 pm

The Open House began at 7:00 pm. Visitors were encouraged to walk around, look at the Design Guidelines illustrated on Display Boards, and provide feedback directly on the boards using post it notes or by filling out a feedback form.

Presentation: 7:30 pm – 8:00 pm

At 7:30 pm Alexis Dileo introduced herself as the new project manager and welcomed the public to the community open house. She reminded the audience that this was an open house format and the intent was to provide a brief presentation with Q &A,

followed by a more open format in which members of the public could browse the design guideline document and display boards and ask staff questions. She noted that this was not the most appropriate setting for general comments and that such feedback would be more helpful written on the forms provided, at the display stations, and at City Councils public hearing on the design guidelines - which has been tentatively scheduled for October 5th, 2009.

Following the introduction, Abe Barge gave a brief presentation, providing an overview of the Design Guidelines Document, and setting up the context for application of the design guidelines. He discussed elements of Chapter 1: how design guidelines relate to zoning and historic district regulations and how they add an additional layer of detail to such regulations. In addition, he discussed Chapters 2 and 3 as well, primarily focusing on the guideline format and helping the public to understand the logic of the layout and high priority guidelines.

At the end of his presentation he prompted the audience with several questions to gauge if the guidelines went too far, not far enough, just right, etc.

Q&A (and Comments):8:00 pm – 9:15 pm

Question: Chapter 1 states that the zoning and historic district guidelines are mandatory and that the design guidelines process is intended to be voluntary. These are a giant loophole. Why aren't there more strict procedures, why can't they be put into zoning/made mandatory?

Answer: Intention is that these will be voluntary, based on feedback From City Council to the Steering Committee. Developers are encouraged to comply and will likely have to make a formal design guidelines compliance statement on their petitions.

Q: Plans could be approved after submitted?

A: Across the county, there are many different approaches. With voluntary, it is not as predictable. As an alternative, there is advisory review – having a staff or panel issue an opinion on a project. The current draft indicates that developers will provide a statement on the site plan, this will be evaluated but approval of site plan cannot be conditioned upon compliance with the design guidelines.

Comment: *I thought that all along the intention was to have a group analyzing proposed projects according to the design guidelines – whether that group was a third party group or City Planning Staff. Expected that there would be a group to advise.*

Q: Directed at Barge – are there cities that you have worked with that have mandatory guidelines?

A: Athens, Ga is an example of a city that has mandatory guidelines and they even allow some projects that meet/exceed the guidelines to exceed zoning requirements. Boulder, Co is an example of a city that has advisory guidelines with a mandatory third party review

Q: Please remember that decision has a long echo period, and that the decision made regarding the design guidelines will be felt for generations. Will they inspire or be mediocre? Paris or Prague? Are the Design Guidelines too timid?

A: The guidelines do not discourage creative design; they are intended to allow for flexibility. Can't guarantee a Prague, but we don't necessarily want a Prague. We want creative solutions to make Ann Arbor the best Ann Arbor it can be.

Q: The driving force behind the Design Guidelines was to have them as part of the approval process. If they are voluntary, how can we hold developers to design guidelines and ensure that they do what they say they will do?

A: This is where the public comes in –speak out regarding projects and say “this doesn't ultimately fit the design guidelines goals.” Also, as the guidelines are tested, some parts may become mandatory. Currently the City utilizes development agreements for projects in the downtown area. It requires that the final façade approved is the final façade that will be built. If developers don't follow through, then the City may withhold permits, certificates, etc.

C: *A process that requires a commitment to peer and/or professional review would be harder to wiggle to out of.*

C: *The audience is concerned – they want peer or staff review and they are concerned about the lack of public participation. Public comment in October is too late.*

A: We have heard your concern about the voluntary nature of the design guidelines. Rather than continue to focus on that issue, use this time to also give feedback regarding the content of the document. Are these the design guidelines you want?

C: *Understand favoring more teeth – but also favors flexibility/discretion and it is a challenge to find a balance*

C: *Comfortable with the guidelines because they are just that, guidelines.*

Q: The guidelines haven't been posted for very long, can we have more copies elsewhere? At the library?

A: Will make color copies available at the library, can print out black and white copies at the planning department, and can make a file available at a local print shop so that those who wish can pay to print their own color copy.

C: *Need more time to look at the content, be careful about how quickly you move*

C: *If summary of comments needs to be to you by Sept. 14th that is less time.*

A: Staff acknowledged there is a short time period between the open house and the joint work session and explained that there are additional opportunities for comments including at the Work session which will have some sort of live call in feature.

C: *Improvement in precision of language – has not caught any “if possibles.” It looks like a precise and effective change.*

C: *We now have a public involvement process for projects of a certain size – don't forget to tie this document into the bigger picture and CPO review.*

C: *Character area map doesn't print in black and white.*

C: *Graphics for the character areas are lacking – make them reflective for actual character districts – currently you show the same images for different districts*

Q: Is a development agreement a practical approach to getting compliance?

A: If one party is unwilling to sign-up, then it is not a viable option. It is effective to document verbal commitments but not effective to convince one party to agree or to change what they have proposed. It is unrealistic to assume a developer would enter into a development agreement with terms he/she does not accept.

Q: For a site at the corner of Huron and Main, what sort of codes or rules would apply? What role does the DDA play?

A: That particular site would be in the D1 zoning district, would be in the Main Street character overlay zone, and on a primary street frontage. The zoning regulations and design guidelines are administered and enforced by the City. The DDA is an administrative body and has no regulatory or legislative authority. The DDA

would manage the taxes received from the new development at that location to benefit the entire downtown area.

At 8:15 staff surveyed the audience as whether they would prefer to end the Q&A period and return to an open house format or if they would prefer to continue with the Q&A format. The audience chose to continue with the Q&A format.

C: Many people that have been to public hearings are being ignored. Step backs may soften from the sidewalk a little bit – but doesn't fool anyone – you can still see the larger building.

C: The suggestion of breaking up the building (requiring articulation) based on the smaller; underlying lot size has an unintended consequence of encouraging lot assembly, the tear down of smaller buildings and building bigger imitations.

A: The design guidelines work within zoning, and I don't really agree that modules will encourage lot collection.

Q: Can you comment on the public input process? And from those how you got this? Have you seen any communities that have “partial requirements” some mandatory and some not?

A: Regarding the public input process, a series of community workshops started with a general outlook, took comments and made adjustments and then got more feedback. Additional workshops then took broad ideas and refined them, and lastly clarified and prioritized. Regarding other community approaches, some use mandatory guidelines and some do not. In fact, there are many approaches throughout the country. In one example, a community has high priority guidelines in zoning, with a supplemental handbook. If can quantify, can go in zoning.

Q: Give us more time. Will you propose that this be postponed?

A: The Steering Committee has established the proposed timeline, staff cannot commit to postponing the schedule. However, staff will be meeting with the Steering Committee and we will relay everyone's comments – including the suggestions to postpone.

C: These guidelines have no weight – this process needs a lot more tweaking by the public.

A: Staff acknowledged they understood the majority of audience members do not want these to be entirely voluntary

C: *Alternative view – the longer the delay in implementing these – the greater the chances for things that don't fit.*

Q: Some buildings now do not last – modern buildings last 20 – 30 years. Do you address this?

A: All structures must meet the building code. The proposed Design guidelines talk about durability of exterior materials of the structure. Downtown buildings are generally built differently than big box type buildings usually found on the perimeter of a city. Those big boxes are often meant to last only 20 years but downtown buildings are meant to last much longer than 20 to 30 years.

Q: Definition of sustainability. Some sustainable guidelines don't push an overall integrated approach to sustainability. Can this be strengthened with the design guidelines providing pattern for sustainability?

A: Preservation of existing buildings, embodied energy. Current draft does not go as far as requiring building to last 100 years.

C: *Photos of offsets don't show ground level perspectives.*

A: Meant to illustrate concept. All images in the draft design guidelines are of downtown Ann Arbor.

Q: Have you had complaints about the cost of offsets?

A: Yes

Q: Do guidelines address preservation outside of historic districts?

A: No

Q: Are there any buildings that we have in our community to illustrate? The negative examples as well?

A: Yes, positive examples. Struggle with showing negative examples from communities.

Q: Slide example (street wall). Recent examples are boxes with Lego blocks. Nothing to prevent this is governed by zoning or design review (not side of rear setbacks). Alarming. Urge comments. This is why people feel so strongly about design review. Going too fast, not enough public process. Wishy-Washy feeling about design review.

C: *Missing from this – you are not guaranteeing buildings are built with decoration.
Ugly buildings have no decoration.*

A: No we don't get as fine grained as directing people about how to decorate.

C: In contrast – craftsmen built those buildings and a great number of skilled jobs are gone or no time to invest that detail.

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Written Comments attached to the Design Guidelines Display Boards

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2.2 Activate an urban open space with uses and amenities that provide interest to pedestrians.

Use at least two of the following:

- Landscaping
- Benches
- Public art
- Lighting
- Architectural details, windows and storefronts on walls that frame the space
- Landscaping (including plant materials, site structures and decorative paving)

What about sun orientation for public open spaces? (and shade)

3.3 Locate a surface parking area to minimize impacts on pedestrians.

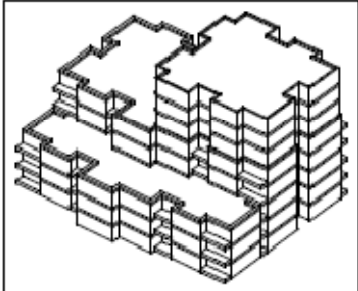
Appropriate locations include:

- Behind a building
- To the side of a building
- Behind a landscaped area

How's about a landscaped area at the back of a parking lot. When it abuts residences?



Although the traditional streetwall height is low throughout most of downtown Ann Arbor, tower elements sometimes rise directly from the sidewalk edge for a limited portion of the streetwall. Horizontal facade articulation can help such buildings fit with adjacent lower scale development.



Step taller building elements back, and away from, adjacent lower-scale buildings or neighborhoods.

Where's the max "diagonal" idea?

5.0 Building Height

Building height principles include both the location and overall height of taller building elements as well as the height of buildings at the streetwall or near lower scale buildings and neighbors. The existing variety of building heights in downtown Ann Arbor helps to define the character of the area. The scale is generally low at the sidewalk edge with streetwall heights most often ranging from two to four stories and taller building elements stepping into the property. In some cases, tower elements rise directly at the sidewalk edge for a limited portion of the streetwall.

New development should continue Ann Arbor's tradition of height variation, expressing and supporting human scale and architectural diversity in the area while also respecting adjacent lower scale buildings or neighborhoods. This can be accomplished while also accommodating taller new buildings. It is important to note that the downtown zoning districts set the maximum building height and provide maximum and minimum heights for the streetwall portion of a building.

5.1 Position or configure taller building elements to minimize impacts on adjacent lower-scale areas.

Appropriate strategies include:

- Stepping taller building elements back, and away from, adjacent lower-scale buildings or neighborhoods
- Locating taller building elements at the intersection of one or more primary streets

Where's the concern for set-back from smaller residential bldgs behind the commercial street?

7.2 Orient a building to maximize green building principles while ensuring compatibility with adjacent, lower-scale buildings or neighborhoods.

Appropriate strategies include:

- Positioning the taller portion of a building along a north-south axis to minimize shading on lower scale neighborhoods to the north
- Positioning a building to prevent shading on southfacing facades of adjacent buildings during winter months, where heat gain is desired
- Positioning the taller portion of a building to minimize

Yes, yes, yes. Can you make it obligatory that they can't block nearby bldgs' sunshine?

winter shading on adjacent sidewalks and open spaces to prevent ice-over.

10.0 Windows

The size, shape and positioning of windows on the facade of a building helps define a sense of scale and continuity. In downtown Ann Arbor, the upper story windows of traditional commercial buildings often appear to align with others in the block, and establish a rhythm, or pattern, of solid and void that visually links buildings along the street. Lower story windows of traditional commercial buildings generally provide for a very high level of transparency consistent with a pedestrian-oriented storefront setting.

Window design and placement should help to establish a sense of scale and provide visual interest. In areas where traditional window patterns are clearly established, continuing the general pattern is encouraged. However, new strategies may be introduced, including contemporary and creative window rhythms and patterns. Where new ground floor office or residential space is built in areas that were traditionally defined by commercial storefronts, ground floor window patterns should create the highest level of transparency possible while providing sufficient privacy for occupants.

What about occupant/tenant blocking transparent windows?

12.0 Sustainability in Building Elements

The elements that make up a building can significantly impact its environmental performance. Such elements include windows, materials and mechanical systems.

Building elements should be selected and applied to maximize the building's environmental performance while promoting compatibility with surrounding sites and buildings. New or innovative building materials are appropriate if they have been tested and proven effective in a similar climate. Solar or wind systems are also encouraged if located to minimize visual impacts on neighboring sites or buildings. Where environmental or mechanical systems may generate noise, they should be located to minimize potential impacts on neighboring sites or buildings.

Do any of the guidelines contribute to making AA a truly unique city?

12.1 Use sustainable building materials whenever possible.

Such materials include:

- Recycled materials
- Rapidly renewable materials
- Locally manufactured materials

What about repair and re-use of durable materials?

- Low maintenance materials
- Materials with long life spans

Such materials do not include:

- Toxic or otherwise hazardous materials
- Materials with high thermal absorption and expansion, especially when applied to large east or west facing exposures