

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Design Review Board

SUBJECT: **Report on Design Review Process**

DATE: February 3, 2017 DRAFT

In accordance with its bylaws, the Design Review Board reports annually to City Council regarding the effectiveness of the design review process and makes recommendations for any changes to the Downtown Design Guidelines. Please find the requested report below.

Report on Design Review Program

The Downtown Design Guidelines, originally conceived as part of the A2D2 Ann Arbor Discovering Downtown project begun in 2006, were adopted on February 7, 2011. On that date, City Council also established a Design Review Board and appointed seven citizen representatives to serve. Proposed projects that are (a) in the D1 or D2 zoning districts or within the DDA boundary already zoned or proposed to be zoned PUD, and (b) not in a historic district, and (c) propose an increase in floor area, and (d) require any type of site plan approval, whether administrative, by Planning Commission or City Council, are required to be reviewed by the Design Review Board. The Design Review Board engages in a dialog with the developer and project designers, discussing consistency with the Downtown Design Guidelines. The Design Review Board seeks to help projects interpret the Downtown Design Guidelines and achieve the overarching goal – excellence in the design of the built environment of downtown Ann Arbor.

To date, the Design Review Board has reviewed 27 design plans.

Year	Design Plans
2011	2
2012	3
2013	3
2014	6
2015	7
2016	6
Total:	27

Three of the 27 design plans involved the same site, 319 North Main Street (currently under construction as Sun Baths). All but two, or 25 design plans, were subsequently submitted for site plan approval. One of those, the McKinley Technology Centre Phase 2 at 310 Miller Avenue, appears to have been dropped.

Each of the submitted site plans were approved. Fifteen of them have been constructed or are currently under construction, as follows:

1. 618 South Main Street
2. 413 East Huron Street (now known as The Foundry)
3. 624 Church Street (Arbor Blu)
4. Kerrytown Place, 401-403 North Fourth Avenue and 410 North Main Street
5. The Varsity at Ann Arbor, 425 East Washington Street
6. 319 North Main Street (Sun Baths)
7. Bank of Ann Arbor, 125 South Fifth Avenue
8. 116-120 West Huron Street (Marriott Residence Inn and Zingerman's Greyline)
9. 314 South Fourth Avenue (Ruth's Chris)
10. 220 West Ann Street
11. 121 West Kingsley Street (Kingsley West)
12. Kingsley Parkside, 213 West Kingsley Street
13. 603 East Huron Street
14. The Residences at 615 South Main Street
15. 408-412 North First Street

Some design plans have been discussed twice by the Design Review Board by design teams voluntarily submitting revised plans for further review. These twice-considered plans include:

- 603 East Huron Street – November and December 2015
- The Collegian North at 1107 South University Avenue – September and October 2016
- The Collegian East at 1209 South University Avenue – October and November 2016

The Design Review Board has begun rotating representatives to the Planning Commission to establish better communication and continuity from the design plan phase to the site plan phase. Starting with The Collegian East site plan, 1209 South University Avenue, in early 2017, a Boardmember will summarize the comments of the Board and provide feedback on any changes made to the design since the Design Review Board's last meeting with the applicant.

Recommended Changes

Overall, the Design Review Board is convinced that the Downtown Design Guidelines and their current process result in significantly better downtown projects than what was realized before 2011. Nevertheless, the Board repeats their suggestions for changes to the Guidelines and now suggests requiring applicants to submit revised plans. Their detailed suggestions are outlined below.

Downtown Design Guidelines

1. Switch *Chapter 1: General Design Guidelines* and *Chapter 2: Design Guidelines for Character Districts*. This will offer a more natural reading, starting from the largest scale (the character districts), to site context (typically one or a few downtown blocks), to the building, and finally to a building's elements.
2. Describe and define context. More explanation and description is needed within the Downtown Design Guidelines of context, including how it is defined, how it is interpreted and how it should be applied to proposed projects.
3. Re-evaluate the character district boundaries and descriptions to determine if districts, and which ones, can be combined. The Downtown Design Guidelines (as well as the Zoning Ordinance) describe eight different character districts within the downtown and offers a description of their existing features. The Design Review Board feels there may actually be far fewer truly distinct areas within the downtown. Applying the Downtown Design Guidelines has shown that there is more similarity than differences in the character districts. All nine character districts should be re-evaluated for consolidation, particular those in the downtown core. Fewer, but more distinct, character districts may do more to preserve the existing features while generating higher quality, complimentary new designs than retaining all nine current districts.
4. Expand on the descriptions of the character districts. The Design Review Board suggests developing expanded, more detailed, and more specific descriptions for each character district in the Downtown Design Guidelines document. Each description should include language regarding the predominant architectural style, design eras, and specific architectural elements currently found as well as recommended within the character area. This will help both designers and the Design Review Board determine if a proposed design is in keeping with a character area and furthers the overarching goal of the guidelines.

Procedures

1. Require resubmittal of revised plans to the Design Review Board. The Board is cognizant of not lengthening an already lengthy review and approval process, however, experience has shown that design plans that are reconsidered after review are significantly improved over those that move forward without a second review. Design plans only reviewed once tend to guess at implementing the Board's recommended changes and the final designs approved with site plans often do not satisfactorily address the Board's key concerns. The Design Review Board suggests amendments to Chapter 57, Section 5:136 to implement a two-review process.

Recommended by: Gary Cooper
Tamara Burns, Chair
Paul Fontaine
William Kinley
Richard Mitchell
Geoffrey M. Perkins
Lori Singleton

Prepared by: Alexis DiLeo, City Planner