



Legislation Text

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Resolution to Approve Implementation of the Ann Arbor Discovering Downtown (A2D2) Recommendations for Downtown Design Standards, Design Guidelines and Design Review Process Attached for your review and approval is a resolution to approve implementation of recommendations that would create design standards and guidelines and a design review process for downtown development. These recommendations were developed by the A2D2 Steering Committee, the Design Guidelines Advisory Committee and staff to implement the Downtown Development Strategies Final Report.

Background

On March 20, 2006, City Council approved the Implementation Plan for the Downtown Development Strategies Final Report and directed staff to begin work on priority elements of the plan.

On July 17, 2006, City Council approved the work plans for the following initiatives:

- Create special overlay zoning for the downtown that identifies areas of similar character
- Streamline the development proposal process (process mapping and technology improvements)
- Incorporate a set of essential design standards
- Pursue a comprehensive parking strategy for the downtown
- Work with the Historic District Commission to clarify criteria for development

The Council appointed advisory committees for each project in October 2006 to assist staff and the Steering Committee in developing these recommendations.

Advisory Committee Review Process

In the summer of 2006, staff coordinated with the American Institute of Architects' Huron Valley Chapter a lecture series on urban design concepts. The AIA-HV conducted three sessions in Fall 2006 and successfully established a common dialogue and knowledge base that served as a foundation to begin discussions of how regulation of design might be applied in Ann Arbor.

The Design Guidelines Advisory Committee was appointed by City Council in October of 2006. At its second meeting, the committee adopted the following goal statement:

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

Over the next several months, the Advisory Committee and staff met regularly to conduct case study research, identify possible approaches and gauge public support for the development of design guidelines. The committee conducted a thorough selection process to engage a consultant to facilitate public input and assist with this process. The team that was selected, Winter & Company/RACESTUDIO, was signed to a contract in April 2007.

The Committee and consultant team conducted a community workshop on urban design issues in May 2007. Based on feedback from the workshop and focus group interviews, the Committee recommended to City Council that design guidelines be created for the downtown. On June 18, 2007, City Council approved Resolution R-258-6-07, which authorized the consultant team to proceed in developing an urban design framework and an urban design guidelines/standards document.

To assist in developing the design framework and guidelines, the Committee and consultant team sought input from the public at two additional community workshops. In July 2007, workshop participants reviewed proposed standards for massing and frontage and identified sub-areas of downtown with similar character. In September 2007, workshop participants reviewed highlights of the draft design standards and guidelines.

In addition to input obtained at the community workshops, members of the public regularly attended the advisory committee meetings and provided written and verbal comments on the draft design guidelines. All of the committee's working documents and background materials were made available on the A2D2 website.

Recommendations

The Design Guidelines Advisory Committee recommends that City Council implement a context-based design review process for downtown development. The proposed design standards and guidelines developed through the A2D2 process are based on urban design principles that promote active and pedestrian-friendly streets, design excellence, sustainable building and economic development. Most of these basic design principles are described in the Downtown Plan and commonly accepted as best practices.

The package of downtown design changes recommended by the Committee includes three elements: design standards, design guidelines and the design review process. These elements are described below, and the associated documents are attached to this report.

- **Design Standards:** Design standards provide refinements to the A2D2 Downtown Zoning Advisory Committee's recommendations for the placement and form of buildings, both at street level and upper stories along a street (see A2D2 zoning recommendation report). The proposed standards do not change the recommended boundaries or the floor area and use recommendations for the proposed Core and Interface areas.

Two new overlay zones are proposed to be added to the zoning ordinance: a massing district overlay and a street frontage overlay. The massing districts provide grade- and upper-level setback requirements based on a property's location in sub-areas of distinct development context, such as "parapet" blocks or "residential" style blocks. Frontage designations provide setback requirements from the right-of-way line based on the property's location along Primary, Secondary, or Front Yard streets.

- **Design Guidelines:** A document describing the community's desired objectives for downtown buildings and sites was developed to guide the design of new development. The guidelines address site planning, building massing and building elements. Most of the guidelines are applicable throughout the downtown, addressing elements such as open space, roof form, and street level entries. Other guidelines are unique to specific "character areas", identifying different materials or street-level design approaches to respond to the surrounding context.

The design guidelines provide developers and the public with a description of the key elements of development desired in the downtown. Only certain guidelines will be applicable for any given development, but the guidelines are comprehensive to address many different types of sites and development proposals.

- **Design Review Process:** To implement the design guidelines, the recommendations call for a required design review downtown projects undergoing a site plan or Planned Unit Development site plan review. Downtown properties in an historic district would not be subject to these design guidelines; they would instead be subject to the new design guidelines for historic districts, which are applied by the Historic District Commission.

The proposed two-step design review process requires an administrative review by Planning & Development staff prior to site plan review (for massing and conceptual design) and during site plan review (for detailed design). Staff will evaluate a proposal using relevant guidelines and issue a determination to the Planning Commission. A design advisory resource panel will be established to provide, upon request, advice to staff in the application of design standards. A developer has the option of appealing a staff decision to the Planning Commission and City Council. An option for alternative compliance is also proposed to provide flexibility for unusual sites or designs.

The Committee recognizes that additional refinement of the design standards, guidelines and review process may be necessary to meet overall A2D2 design and process goals. These refinements will be considered by the Planning Commission as part of the implementation process, and will be open to additional public comment.

In addition to implementation of the necessary codes, the Committee recommends that the Planning Commission develop an annual evaluation process to determine if the design guidelines and the associated review process are meeting City goals. In addition, the Committee strongly recommends that resources be identified for training of staff, planning commissioners, design professionals, and neighborhood advocates in the application of the design guidelines.

Due to the large size of the Design Guidelines file, we are unable to pdf them. You may reach them through the attached link.

Wendy Rampson, Systems Planner

Jayne Miller, Community Services Administrator

Roger W. Fraser, City Administrator

Whereas, On March 20, 2006, City Council adopted Resolution R-94-3-06 to approve the Implementation Plan for the Downtown Development Strategies Final Report;

Whereas, On July 17, 2006 City Council adopted Resolution R-332-7-06 to approve the work plans for high priority projects related to downtown zoning, urban design guidelines, historic preservation criteria; parking, and streamlining development processes;

Whereas, On October 3, 2006, City Council adopted Resolution R-448-10-06, appointing five Ann Arbor Discovering Downtown (A2D2) advisory committees to work with staff on the A2D2 work plans;

Whereas, The Design Guidelines Advisory Committee has met since November 2006 to conduct case study research on design approaches on other communities; identify downtown character areas; and engage a consultant to assist with the development of the guidelines and to help facilitate the public input;

Whereas, At the advice of staff, the Design Guidelines Advisory Committee, and the A2D2 Steering Committee, City Council adopted Resolution R-104-3-07 on March 19, 2007 for a professional services agreement with Winter & Company/RACESTUDIO and an urban design guidelines project budget;

Whereas, City Council adopted Resolution 259-6-07 which authorized the creation of urban design guidelines for downtown Ann Arbor;

Whereas, The proposed design recommendations are based on input from community workshops and focus groups held in May, July and September 2007 and comments from the public received in response to draft design guidelines; and

Whereas, The Design Guidelines Advisory Committee recommends that City Council approve the implementation of the proposed design standards, design guidelines and design review process;

RESOLVED, That City Council approves implementation of design standards, design guidelines and design review recommendations for downtown, as outlined in the attached documents dated October 5, 2007;

RESOLVED, That City Council requests that City Planning Commission develop supporting amendments to the Downtown Plan and Central Area Plan and amendments to the Zoning, Off-Street Parking and Subdivision and Land Use Control Ordinances to implement the design standards, guidelines and process recommendations, and to bring these amendments to City Council for consideration by May 2008;

RESOLVED, That City Council requests the City Planning Commission reconcile any differences between the Design Guidelines Advisory Committee recommendations and those of the Downtown Zoning Advisory Committee as part of the master plan and code amendment process; and

RESOLVED, That City Council directs staff to provide a proposed evaluation process when code amendments are submitted to City Council for action.