

**To: Mayor Hieftje and Members of the City Council**  
**From: Design Review Board**  
**Subject: Comments on the recommendations of the Perdu Group and the Planning Commission regarding the Design Review Board's role**  
**Date: January 21, 2014**

On behalf of the Design Review Board, I wanted to share our responses to the Perdu report and Planning Commission recommendations and the Downtown and Near-Downtown Neighborhoods Group letter of Jan 10<sup>th</sup> 2014.

The DRB is not supportive at this time to making conformance to the design guidelines mandatory in the development process, and I want to specifically state that tying FAR premiums to the DRB is premature at this point, although this is something we are open to discussing in the future.

The original concept for DRB review was an informal working session to meet with the design team and offer advice about the project before it was submitted. The design review process was envisioned to be similar to the historic review process, with qualitative guidelines, rather than quantitative requirements. The DRB's primary role is to assist petitioners in understanding and interpreting the current design guidelines as they design the project.

Last year, we looked at the outcomes of projects that had gone through DRB review and indicated to Council that the approach is sound and having a good impact. However, we feel it can and should be better and think there are two major items that need revision.

The first is to update the DESIGN GUIDELINES. We agree with the Perdu statement that "the design guidelines will need to be revised to better articulate how surrounding context is interpreted". The members of the Design Guidelines Task Force felt that the Design Guidelines needed more work when they were published but that the best course would be to start using them and then revisit them after a year or so. Through use of the guidelines, we have found that while projects may technically meet the guidelines, the results could be better. A Task Force has been appointed and will hopefully be moving forward on this effort.

The second is to update the PROCESS. We agree with the statement in the Perdu report that "more and earlier involvement of the Design Review Board in the development process should be required". There will be benefit in meeting with petitioners earlier in the process and the board will be exploring how to do this without unduly adding to the review process.

The Design Review Board agrees there should be cross representation between the Design Review Board and the Planning Commission, however is not in agreement yet on how that would happen.

The Design Review Board does NOT agree that a member of the HDC should sit on the DRB. A more important quality for a board member is a sensitivity to context – historic or otherwise. We are looking for what are the characteristics which should be "taken stock" of and responded to. We feel that the design professionals on the board, together with the focus on context will cover what this potential member would bring.

The DRB does NOT agree with making recommendations as opposed to comments at this time. This would be part of the future discussion on moving from voluntary to mandatory compliance. The discussions now are in the spirit of bringing different perspectives and ideas to a design that the designer then takes away to do his/her work. However, this method's downside is not always providing clarity and direction, and a petitioner can hear what they want to hear on certain issues. We need to identify the big issues of each petition and offer specific direction on each as a group. We have definitely made progress on honing in on the big issues over the time we have served, but it will continue to need work.

Respectfully submitted by Tamara Burns, Chair