

APPROVED Minutes of the Special Session of the HDC, January 8, 2009

Commissioners present: Sarah Shotwell, Diane Giannola, Michael Bruner, Robert White, Jim Henrichs, Kristina Glusac and Ellen Ramsburgh (7)

Commissioners absent: None.

Staff present: Jill Thacher, Historic Preservation Coordinator; Wendy Rampson, Systems Planning; and Kristine Kidorf, Kidorf Preservation Consulting.

CALL TO ORDER: Chair Shotwell called the Special Session to order at 6:00PM.

ROLL CALL: Quorum satisfied.

READING OF ORDER AND NOTICE OF CALL OF SPECIAL SESSION: Read by J. Thacher.

SS-1 Review of proposed A2D2 zoning ordinance and downtown plan changes in downtown historic districts

Wendy Rampson, Systems Planning, introduced herself and summarized the A2D2 process to date. She described the different areas being examined as part of the study. Rampson described the zoning and downtown plan pieces of the process. She explained that Historic Districts are an overlay district, meaning they are added on top of existing zoning requirements. A goal of A2D2 is to simplify downtown zoning. One change is the proposed use of floor area premiums for residential uses, which would allow bonus density above the maximum. Under the A2D2 proposal, premiums would not apply to historic districts. A2D2 design guidelines would not apply in historic districts because districts already have their own design guidelines. At this point, zoning is moving forward, and design guidelines are on hold.

Rampson presented a map of proposed downtown zoning districts with existing historic districts. She described the core area, called D1, where the greatest use density is most appropriate. The interface or D2 area has mixed uses but is not as dense as the core area. The South University area is proposed to be D1. No height limit is proposed for the downtown D1. A limit of 120 feet is currently proposed in the South University area, and the D2 is proposed to have a limit of 60 feet.

Rampson presented a second map showing character overlay zoning districts to work in tandem with the design guidelines. The guidelines would be applied with slight differences for each of the character areas.

A third map, the proposed building frontage map, was described and Rampson explained the different front setbacks allowed in the different areas shown on the map.

The proposal going through planning commission right now includes these three maps along with the zoning language.

Commissioner Bruner asked how the different setbacks would be determined. Rampson explained that it would depend on the context of the existing block and where buildings

are now setback. He asked how they were arrived at to begin with. Rampson explained that consultants determined it based on the physical inventory as well as public comment. Ramsburgh asked how close these matched the current buildings, and she said it was fairly close with some outliers like the chocolate shop on S Main. Jim Henrichs asked if the proposed historic district guidelines align with the proposed setbacks and Kristine Kidorf explained that historic guidelines will prevail over the downtown design guidelines. Rampson explained that this conflict currently exists in downtown, and the historic guidelines prevail.

Ramsburgh asked for clarification on the DDA boundary on the south side of William Street. Shotwell asked if there would be affordable housing premiums. Rampson explained the housing premiums. Shotwell asked if housing premiums would be allowed in the historic districts and Rampson said no. Ramsburgh asked for clarification of the historic building premium, and Rampson explained that it would be 50% and onsite. Shotwell asked about a TDR bonus and Rampson explained that it's not incorporated in the current version, though it has been discussed.

Glusac asked about abutting properties to historic districts. Rampson explained that there are no additional setback requirements specific to historic districts, though there are some adjacent to residential fringe areas.

Bruner asked about the memo received from Rentrop & Morrison about a proposed buffer. Susan Morrison of Rentrop & Morrison was present, representing the Michigan Historic Preservation Network and Peter Haydon, and explained that the buffer concept was scaled back to 150 feet from the previous memo. Rampson explained that the sense is that adding an additional buffer to the existing downtown historic districts would be overly restrictive. Rampson pointed out some examples of how the buffer would appear on the map and some of the properties it would affect.

Morrison explained that she represents the properties on Washington Street in particular and is trying to address the problem of looming buildings shading historic properties. She is trying to achieve stepped back buildings that do not tower over district and national register properties. She is seeking a way to make that transition in height a reality. She said the question is what you do with buildings right next to a district or resource that affect irreplaceable buildings.

Giannola said it seems that we're just moving the edge of the historic district and drawing a new boundary, rather than protecting historic resources.

Shotwell said that the evolution of cities is important and that tall buildings are a fact of life. She cited Philadelphia as an example. She understands that making historic buildings into islands is not desirable, and possibly prefers some design guideline tweaks.

Bruner stated that downtown Philadelphia has changed because a gentleman's agreement was not adhered to limiting the height of buildings.

Ramsburgh described additional concerns of the Ann Arbor Preservation Alliance that were outlined in a letter of December 29, 2008. The Commissioners briefly discussed edges and the effects of development on districts.

Henrichs described massing standards in other cities that require tall buildings to be stepped back. Rampson described the downtown design guidelines in a little more detail. Shotwell asked about stepping back neighboring buildings at some height between the max allowed and that allowed in historic districts.

Thacher described the National Register bulletin that says they do not recommend including buffer zones around historic districts. Morrison said that Berkeley, California may have a progressive buffer zone. Bruner said that the contrast between Birmingham's and Royal Oak's design guidelines are quite stark. Rampson said that the Birmingham design guidelines were considered by the A2D2 group and rejected as too sterile. Bruner said that the scale restrictions in Birmingham are a problem. There was a discussion of the kind of development needed by modern cities and whether different schemes would affect historic districts and downtowns in different ways.

Minutes by: Jill Thacher, Planning and Development Services