



City of Ann Arbor

301 E. Huron St.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
<http://a2gov.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>

Meeting Minutes Design Review Board

Wednesday, December 18, 2013

3:00 PM

Guy C. Larcom, Jr. Municipal Building,
301 E. Huron St., Basement Conference Room

A CALL TO ORDER

Chair Burns called the meeting to order at 3:15 pm.

B ROLL CALL

Rampson called the roll.

Present 4 - Chet Hill, Tamara Burns, William Kinley, and Geoffrey M. Perkins

Absent 3 - Richard (Dick) Mitchell, Paul Fontaine, and Mary Jukuri

C APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Approved.

D APPROVAL OF MINUTES

[13-1546](#)

November 20, 2013 Design Review Board Meeting Minutes

Moved by Perkins, seconded by Kinley, to approve the minutes of November 20, 2013, with a correction to the last sentence of the second paragraph under New Business, to read

"It was also noted that this change would likely require a petitioner to attend more than one DRB meeting, which adds time to the process."

On a voice vote, the Chair declared the motion carried.

E UNFINISHED BUSINESS

[13-1524](#)

Discussion on the Downtown Zoning Evaluation Recommendations - The Planning Commission has conducted an evaluation of the downtown zoning changes that were adopted in 2009 and will consider a set of recommendations for changes to the zoning ordinance. These recommendations will be forwarded to the City Council for its action. Background information on the evaluation project may be found at www.a2gov.org/downtownzoning <<http://www.a2gov.org/downtownzoning>>.

Fontaine arrived at 3:25 pm.

Rampson updated the Board about the status of the Planning Commission's review of the downtown zoning changes. She noted the handout in the packet is the resolution the Planning Commission has forwarded to Council for adoption. She noted that based on the DRB's comments, recommendation #4 was revised to remove the reference linking premiums to Design Review Board approval and instead, recommended mandatory compliance with core design guidelines for use of premiums. The Commission felt there was an important role for the DRB, and 'core design guidelines' would be determined in discussion with the Board.

The Board discussed the possibility of having a joint meeting with the Planning Commission in February to discuss the role of the DRB in the downtown zoning process. It was noted that this would be dependent on when Council acts on the resolution and what Council decides to do about the design guidelines task force. Members of the Board observed that the design process and content have to be worked on together, and the point of this joint meeting would be quantifying compliance with certain design guidelines.

Mitchell arrived at 3:50 pm.

The Board discussed the Planning Commission's recommendations. It was pointed out that if we go to mandatory compliance, the perhaps the requirements should be in the zoning ordinance. The question was raised about the experience of different design review processes in other cities and how they support qualitative decisions. The Board discussed how the process is similar and different from that of the Historic District Commission's review process. It was noted that in the case of the HDC, the Secretary of Interior standards are well-known with broad examples, and the City's downtown design guidelines are less well known with fewer examples for comparison. Board members said they need to know if their review is just part of the premium process, or whether it's going to be all the DRB's decision.

Board members noted that the discussions with developers thus far have been considerate and respectful, and acknowledged that moving to mandatory compliance may change that. It was observed that there is a range of developer responsiveness to recommendations. They discussed how developers are required to provide to the Planning Commission a report with responses to the DRB comments and how reading these reports might be helpful in determining whether elements should be mandatory if developer believes they can't do what the DRB requested. The discussion focused on the 624 Church project and the DRB's comments in relationship to the site plan submittal and other city requirements for issues such as driveway access and trash pick-up.

The Board discussed techniques that could be used to reinforce design in the development review process, such as having a City negotiator or facilitator who could work with the developer to incorporate design recommendations and bring a project to closure. It was noted that Planning staff plays this role in the site plan review process.

The Board discussed ways to get involved earlier in the design process, because members felt they are missing the early design phase, which is a crucial time. One suggestion proposed was having a DRB member participate in the early meetings that staff has with the developer. It was noted that the HDC has used commissioners as liaison to follow a project through the process. It was observed that the response is best coming from the team, since it frames the debate. There is interest in getting into the early design phase by requiring an analysis and orientation to accompany the application; for instance, asking for the approach to the site context is important because it will inform the design philosophy. Sitting down with the developer early to

talk about the design approach can "set the dial" for the project. It was noted that this is likely to be better received because it would happen before the developer spent a lot of money, and because of it being at the early stage, the design is still flexible. Another approach could be a presubmission meeting, although this would add time on to the process. The question was raised as to whether there is a way to incentivize a two-step DRB review process by giving extra premiums or a thumbs up from the DRB. This approach would add extra time to the review process.

F NEW BUSINESS

Rampson said Planning staff will forward the Planning Commission staff reports for projects the Board has reviewed.

Councilmember Briere arrived.

The Board asked about the status of the design guidelines task force that Council reconstituted last summer, but has only met once. Briere noted that she has asked the Mayor to appoint her to the task force [to replace former Councilmember Higgins]. She said that Council has a sense that review of the design guidelines is in order, but there is not an interest in restarting the whole process. She said Council originally intended that the downtown zoning and the downtown design evaluations would track together. She said she understands the DRB has concerns about the design guidelines, and she also understands the DRB has concerns about what its role ought to be in the application of premiums. She noted that the task force is still considered to be "active", although several of those appointed were unable to serve. She noted the mayor could appoint more members.

It was noted that members of the original design guidelines task force recognized at the time the guidelines were adopted they would ultimately need more work. Several members noted that there is a sense that the DRB is the best resource for reviewing the design guidelines, rather than a separate task force. Board members suggested that perhaps the DRB take this over this effort with the assistance of additional members. Briere said it would make sense to approach this as a DRB work plan action. Members noted that there appear to be two possible approaches to moving forward: to replace the appointed task force with the DRB or to add the remaining DRB members to the task force.

Briere asked if the DRB takes this on whether the review can be done in a public meeting format where citizens can participate. She said her interest is in revising the guidelines is that they be clear to everyone and result in the quality the community wants. She noted the community has been very concerned about the massiveness of new buildings.

The Board noted that they are trying to teach the public about design so the community can demand better design in new development, and they believe they are making a good impact. Several noted that they would like to start working on revising the guidelines, although they may be time constrained due to increase in projects. It was noted that if the DRB does become a gatekeeper for the premiums, they would need a different type of design guidelines than we have now. It was also noted that the Board needs to think about grooming new members, so a combination of people from the DRB and elsewhere could make sense. The skills represented on an expanded task force would be similar to those on the DRB, including planning, landscape architecture, and architecture. Briere said she will talk to the mayor about the opportunity of recruiting others to the task force.

Board members agreed that ideally, the DRB would hold a half-day retreat as a whole

to do a deep dive into the issues, then split up into subgroups for the different guideline areas (context/site planning, buildings and building elements) Guidance from this retreat would be provided to the task force.

G PUBLIC COMMENTARY (3 MINUTE MAXIMUM SPEAKING TIME)

No speakers.

H COMMUNICATIONS

[13-1549](#)

Link to 624 Church Street Project; 12/17/2013 Planning Commission Agenda item:
<<http://a2gov.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=1541089&GUID=2EBD99BB-4108-4682-AA6B-E3DFB470BC9E>>

I ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 pm.