



City of Ann Arbor Planning Services

Memorandum

TO: Howard Lazarus, City Administrator

FROM: Brett Lenart, Planning Manager

RE: Downtown Design Review Evaluation

DATE: September 27, 2018

On July 16th, the City Council enacted Resolution R-18-294, which directed the Planning Commission and staff to evaluate the performance of the current design review process against national best practices and recommend a course of action to City Council by October 15, 2018, which is provided here.

Background

Currently, application to the Design Review Board is required for any application in the D1 or D2 Zoning Districts, or on a site proposed or currently zoned PUD in the DDA boundary, that is not located within a Historic District. This review shall occur prior to a Citizen Participation Meeting and prior to submission of an application for development review.

City Council has acknowledged that many residents believe that the massing and design of new downtown buildings do not live up to community aspirations, and that it is appropriate to consider evaluation of this process at this time.

In response to this direction and sentiment, City staff has presented the City Council direction and recommendations to the City's Design Review Board and City Planning Commission to identify a proposed approach to this evaluation. Both boards have provided feedback and the Planning Commission recommends the proposed scope below as a course of action in response to Council's direction.

Scope of Evaluation

Background

- Review of Downtown Design Guidelines
- Review of D1 and D2 Zoning Development Standards, and Design Review Ordinance implementation and subsequent Amendments (including publicly stated intentions)
- Review of City Master Plan language relating to downtown building design (City assembled)
- Photographic Survey/Record Documentation of minimum of 10 buildings prior to Design Review Ordinance, and 10 buildings after Ordinance effect.
- Review of Design Review Board Annual Reports
- Review of Design Review Board Recommendations
- Attend and facilitate work session with Design Review Board and Planning Commission for feedback, perception of process effectiveness, improvement concepts.

- Evaluation of voluntary process vs. codified design requirements via examples of benchmark communities/best practices
 - 5-10 comparison communities based on size of community, physical development pattern of community, market comparison
 - Include examples of downtown design outcomes from comparison communities
- Background Community Engagement Outcomes:
 - Experience-based feedback and recommendations from Planning Commission, Design Review Board, Downtown Development Authority and project professionals who have experienced the process from an applicant perspective.
 - Community feedback on the perceptions of downtown development design, and common areas of value and concern.

Performance Evaluation

- Analysis of the frequency which Design Review process results in design change
- Evaluate community perception of architectural design before and after process established
- Recognize any awards or other indications of acknowledged quality development in City
- Evaluation of Design Review process compared to best practices
 - Volume of applications
 - Comparison of staffing and resources supporting programs
 - Effectiveness of Design Guidelines; Recommendations for Amendments
- Provide recommendation regarding voluntary or codified approach to design approach
- Performance Evaluation Community Engagement Outcomes:
 - Community feedback on the perceptions of downtown development design, and common areas of value and concern.

Implementation Recommendations

- Based on project scope, make implementation recommendations that lead to:
 - Improved process
 - Increased likelihood of positive community perception of downtown development
- Use of design concepts/massing studies/etc. to demonstrate potential impact of proposed changes on development for 5 example sites
- Presentation of recommendations and adoption by Design Review Board, Planning Commission, and City Council (attendance at 3-6 meetings)

Resources

Planning Services anticipates leading this effort with support of an architecture/design firm with experience in development of design guidelines and/or standards for municipal clients. Based on review of similar professional service contracts by other communities staff estimates a cost of \$75,000 to \$150,000 for this support, with a final amount being determined through a request for proposal issuance.

CC: Derek Delacourt, Community Services Administrator
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