

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Design Review Board

SUBJECT: **Report on Design Review Process**

DATE: May 17, 2017

In accordance with its bylaws, the Design Review Board reports annually to City Council regarding the effectiveness of the design review process and makes recommendations for any changes to the Downtown Design Guidelines. Please find the requested report below.

### Report on Design Review Program

The Downtown Design Guidelines, originally conceived as part of the A2D2 Ann Arbor Discovering Downtown project begun in 2006, were adopted on February 7, 2011. On that date, City Council also established a Design Review Board and appointed seven citizen representatives to serve. Proposed projects that are (a) in the D1 or D2 zoning districts or within the DDA boundary already zoned or proposed to be zoned PUD, and (b) not in a historic district, and (c) propose an increase in floor area, and (d) require any type of site plan approval, whether administrative, by Planning Commission or City Council, are required to be reviewed by the Design Review Board. The Design Review Board engages in a dialog with the developer and project designers, discussing consistency with the Downtown Design Guidelines. The Design Review Board seeks to help projects interpret the Downtown Design Guidelines and achieve the overarching goal – excellence in the design of the built environment of downtown Ann Arbor.

To date, the Design Review Board has reviewed 27 design plans.

Year	Design Plans
2011	2
2012	3
2013	3
2014	6
2015	7
2016	6
Total:	27

Three of the 27 design plans involved the same site, 319 North Main Street (currently under construction as Sun Baths). All but two, or 25 design plans, were subsequently submitted for site plan approval. One of those, the McKinley Technology Centre Phase 2 at 310 Miller Avenue, appears to have been dropped.

Each of the submitted site plans were approved. Fifteen of them have been constructed or are currently under construction, as follows:

1. 618 South Main Street
2. 413 East Huron Street (now known as The Foundry)
3. 624 Church Street (Arbor Blu)
4. Kerrytown Place, 401-403 North Fourth Avenue and 410 North Main Street
5. The Varsity at Ann Arbor, 425 East Washington Street
6. 319 North Main Street (Sun Baths)
7. Bank of Ann Arbor, 125 South Fifth Avenue
8. 116-120 West Huron Street (Marriott Residence Inn and Zingerman's Greyline)
9. 314 South Fourth Avenue (Ruth's Chris)
10. 220 West Ann Street
11. 121 West Kingsley Street (Kingsley West)
12. Kingsley Parkside, 213 West Kingsley Street
13. 603 East Huron Street
14. The Residences at 615 South Main Street
15. 408-412 North First Street

Some design plans have been discussed twice by the Design Review Board by design teams voluntarily submitting revised plans for further review. These twice-considered plans include:

- 618 South Main Street
- 615 South Main Street
- 603 East Huron Street
- The Collegian North at 1107 South University Avenue
- The Collegian East at 1209 South University Avenue

The Design Review Board has begun rotating representatives to the Planning Commission to establish better communication and continuity from the design plan phase to the site plan phase. Starting with The Collegian East site plan, 1209 South University Avenue, in early 2017, a Boardmember will summarize the comments of the Board and provide feedback on any changes made to the design since the Design Review Board's last meeting with the applicant.

## Recommended Changes

Overall, the Design Review Board is convinced that the Downtown Design Guidelines and their current process result in significantly better downtown projects than what was realized before 2011. Nevertheless, the Board repeats their suggestions for changes to the Guidelines and now suggests requiring applicants to submit revised plans. Their detailed suggestions are outlined below.

### ***Downtown Design Guidelines***

1. Switch *Chapter 1: General Design Guidelines* and *Chapter 2: Design Guidelines for Character Districts*. This will offer a more natural reading, starting from the largest scale (the character districts), to site context (typically one or a few downtown blocks), to the building, and finally to a building's elements.
2. Describe and define context. More explanation and description is needed within the Downtown Design Guidelines of context, including how it is defined, how it is interpreted and how it should be applied to proposed projects.
3. Re-evaluate the character district boundaries and descriptions to determine if districts, and which ones, can be combined. The Downtown Design Guidelines (as well as the Zoning Ordinance) describe eight different character districts within the downtown and offers a description of their existing features. The Design Review Board feels there may actually be far fewer truly distinct areas within the downtown. Applying the Downtown Design Guidelines has shown that there is more similarity than differences in the character districts. All nine character districts should be re-evaluated for consolidation, particularly those in the downtown core. Fewer, but more distinct, character districts may do more to preserve the existing features while generating higher quality, complimentary new designs than retaining all nine current districts.
4. Expand on the descriptions of the character districts. The Design Review Board suggests developing expanded, more detailed, and more specific descriptions for each character district in the Downtown Design Guidelines document. Each description should include language regarding the predominant architectural style, design eras, and specific architectural elements currently found as well as recommended within the character area. This will help both designers and the Design Review Board determine if a proposed design is in keeping with a character area and furthers the overarching goal of the guidelines.

### ***Procedures***

1. Require resubmittal of revised plans to the Design Review Board. The Board is cognizant of not lengthening an already lengthy review and approval process, however, experience has shown that design plans that are reconsidered after review are significantly improved

over those that move forward without a second review. Design plans only reviewed once tend to guess at implementing the Board's recommended changes and the final designs approved with site plans often do not satisfactorily address the Board's key concerns. The Design Review Board suggests amendments to Chapter 57, Section 5:136 to implement a two-review process.

Recommended by: Gary Cooper  
Tamara Burns, Chair  
Paul Fontaine  
William Kinley  
Richard Mitchell  
Geoffrey M. Perkins  
Lori Singleton

Prepared by: Alexis DiLeo, City Planner

## Suggested Amendments to Chapter 57 to Support the Design Review Board 2017 Annual Report to City Council

### Chapter 57 - SUBDIVISION AND LAND USE CONTROL

5:136. - Design Review Board review for certain downtown properties.

- (1) *Intent.* The intent of this section is to foster excellence in the design of Ann Arbor's built environment and apply the Downtown Design Guidelines, as approved by City Council, by requiring a ~~mandatory~~ review of certain projects in the downtown area by the Design Review Board. This section provides ~~petitioners-applicants~~ with the ~~procedures and~~ requirements of the Design Review Board's review process.
- (2) *Applicability.* Projects that meet all of the following criteria shall submit an application to the Design Review Board:
  - (a) The project is on a lot zoned D1 or D2; or is located within the Downtown Development Authority boundary on a lot currently zoned or proposed to be zoned PUD; and
  - (b) The project is on a lot that is not located within a historic district; and
  - (c) The project proposes an increase in usable floor area; and
  - (d) The project is a:
    - i. site plan for City Council approval; or
    - ii. a Planned Unit Development Site Plan; or
    - iii. a site plan for Planning Commission approval; or
    - iv. a planned project site plan; or
    - v. an administrative amendment to an approved site plan that significantly alters the appearance of the building from the public right-of-way, as determined by the Planning Manager.
- (3) ~~Design Review Board's~~ *Submittal requirements.* The following steps shall be undertaken by the petitioner as part of the design review process.
  - (a) *Optional pre-application meeting.* The ~~petitioner-applicant~~ may meet with Planning and Development Services staff prior to an application to the Design Review Board to review the Downtown Design Guidelines and design review requirements set forth in this section.
  - (b) *Application.* The ~~petitioner-application~~ shall submit to Planning and Development Services an application for Design Review Board review and pay the required fee. ~~Preliminary project design plans shall be submitted with the application and shall include the following scaled drawings:- An application shall consist of the following information:~~
    - i. ~~Site plan – Scaled drawings illustrating the boundaries of the site, existing structures and improvements and proposed structures and improvements-~~
    - ii. ~~Floor plan(s)- Context Evaluation – Three-dimensional illustrations of existing structures and the proposed structure on the same block and all blocks facing the subject site, or within 200 feet of the subject site, or within a sufficient radius to evaluate how the proposed structure will fit in and interact with the proposed structure.~~

iii. Elevations – Scaled drawings of all facades of the proposed structures including notations and descriptions of proposed materials.

~~iv. Sections. Design Plan Narrative – A written statement describing how the Downtown Design Guidelines influenced the preparation, analysis and decisions involved in proposing a particular design.~~

(c) *Timing.* Submission of the Design Review Board application shall be made such that the Design Review Board's first meeting occurs prior to ~~the fulfillment of~~ the project's citizen participation notice and, if applicable, meeting requirements ~~if required by per~~ section 5:135 (Citizen participation for petitions that require public hearing), otherwise prior to submitting for site plan approval. Second meetings for the same application may be held after a site plan is submitted but shall occur before a public hearing is held.

~~(d) Number of reviews. One review by the Design Review Board is required for each site plan or planned unit development that meets the applicability criteria of section 5:136(2) above. Additional reviews for projects with design changes are optional and must follow the requirements of this section.~~

(4) *Required notice.* A Design Review Board meeting notice shall be mailed by the city to all property owners, addresses, and neighborhood groups within ~~the same radius required by section 5:135 (Citizen participation for petitions that require public hearings)~~ 500 feet at least 10 business days prior to the date of the Design Review Board meeting.

(5) ~~Design Review Board meeting and report~~*Reviews.* ~~The petitioner shall present the project to the Design Review Board.~~ The Design Review Board shall review the application at a public meeting and the petitioner shall have an opportunity to discuss with the applicant the design of the project plan and its consistency with the Downtown Design Guidelines. Following the discussion, the Design Review Board shall ~~make a report of its discussion~~ determine if the design plan is or is not consistent with the Downtown Design Guidelines. If determined to be not consistent, the Design Review Board may require the applicant to revise the design plan for further discussion at a future meeting. In no case shall an applicant be required to discuss the same application more than two times. This report shall be distributed to the Planning Commission and City Council as part of the site plan review and approval process and posted on the city website.