

URBANE DESIGN IN INDIANAPOLIS
Policies and Procedures Sub-Committee
Thursday, August 11, 11:00 a.m.
Ball State College of Architecture and Planning
Indianapolis Center

Present: Lee Alig; Co-chair, Jackie Nytes; Co-chair, Christine Barton-Holmes, Jenelle Collins, Mark Dollase, Thomas Engle, Carolyn Schleif.

Staff: Bob Wilch, Harold Rominger, and Scott Truex.

Discussion

1. After a welcome and introductions, Jackie Nytes described the purpose of the Policies and Procedures Sub-Committee. It is to analyze and recommend changes to the policies and procedures of urban design and zoning review process in the Regional Center. More information regarding the sub-committee is included in the attached document "Urban Design Indianapolis - Policies and Procedures Sub-Committee."
2. Staff gave an overview of the Regional Center review process based on a chart titled "Regional Center Approval." A copy is attached. Regional Center approval is done by staff of the Division of Planning. Only appealed cases are heard by the Metropolitan Development Commission (MDC). Since it is a staff review, there are no public hearings, unless a case is appealed to the MDC or needs a rezoning or variance. At the request of Indianapolis Downtown Incorporated, staff contacts them concerning all cases in their boundary area. Staff has a similar arrangement with the Near North Development Corporation.

Regional Center approval is necessary for all exterior changes including land use, in the Regional Center plus Meridian Street north to 30th Street, as shown on the map. Local historic districts are excluded from Regional Center review. Except for the north Meridian corridor portion of the approval area, there are few written design standards to guide growth. Staff has a number of general policies, such as signs should have dark backgrounds with light letters, that they follow now, but these policies are not written down anywhere. Before a new staff person begins to handle Regional Center approval cases, there is an orientation with senior staff regarding current policies.

In the past, staff of the Division of Planning rotated the task of reviewing Regional Center approval cases. At present, there is one staff person that reviews all cases.

There is an average of 113 Regional Center approval cases each year. The average time spent per case is twelve business days.

3. Jackie Nytes led a discussion of the approval process studies:
 - *Regional Center Approval Process Assessment*, Schmidt Assoc., 2003. This document specifically reviews the Regional Center Review process in Indianapolis.

- *Urban Design Oversight Committee-Design Review Comparative Study*, Scott Day and Nick Kalogeresis, National Main Street Center, 2003. This document describes the review process in fourteen cities.

The two statements made by many of the people interviewed by Dean Illingworth of Schmidt Associates in the first study were that it would be much better if there was some form of public review, especially for significant cases, and there should be written design guidelines to guide growth.

Staff pointed out that the review process would work better if there was some way of triggering an early review of projects, especially on significant cases. It is difficult to suggest changes when the petitioner submits completed working drawings. At present, a petitioner can voluntarily request a staff review of a preliminary concept. It's called a staff inquiry.

It was stated that it is desirable that there be more than just one staff person making decisions about new development in the Downtown.

Public review of Regional Center cases, especially those that have a significant impact on their surroundings, is desirable. Maybe the Historic Preservation review process is a good model. Even though the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission staff can approve minor changes such as replacing a roof or the construction of an outbuilding, all significant developments have to obtain Historic Preservation Commission approval. This means that cases will have a public hearing with an appointed commission making the decisions regarding new development. A possible drawback of this approach, though, is that it takes longer for cases to be processed, since they have to be scheduled before a commission.

It is desirable to have written design guidelines, so that everyone knows what's expected of them. It would be good if there could still be some flexibility in the process, though.

Future Meetings

The need for future Policies and Procedures Sub-Committee meetings was discussed. Staff originally proposed that it would take three meetings to complete the sub-committee's work. In addition to the August 11 meeting, there would be meetings in November and January. Sub-committee members stated that it will probably be necessary to have four meetings. A September 13 meeting was scheduled. At this meeting, there will be a discussion of the report *Urban Design Oversight Committee-Design Review Comparative Study*, Scott Day and Nick Kalogeresis. Staff will prepare and send out a synopsis of this report before the meeting. In addition, there will be a discussion of the historic district approval process at the September meeting.

Next Meeting - Tuesday, September 13, 2005 from 11:00 AM -12:30 PM at the Ball State University, CAP Indianapolis Center at 22 East Washington Street.