

URBAN DESIGN IN INDIANAPOLIS
Policies and Procedures Sub-Committee
Tuesday, October 11, 2005 at 11:00 a.m.
Ball State College of Architecture and Planning
Indianapolis Center

Present: Lee Alig; Co-chair, Jenelle Collins, Thomas Engle, Carolyn Schleif, Tammara Tracy, Blake Wagner.

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

Presentation and Discussion

1. After a welcome by Lee Alig, staff gave an overview of the research done regarding the design review process in other cities. Staff prepared a document entitled *Staff Review of Additional Cities*. A copy is attached.
2. The City of Austin has both the Planning Commission and the Platting and Zoning Commission. In addition, there has been added the Design Commission. The Design Commission performs a number of design related functions as directed by the City Council. The Austin Design Commission has prepared a very good set of design guidelines for new construction in the city center.
3. Staff did not find much on the Internet regarding design review in Boston, Massachusetts. Tom Engle stated that design review in Boston is handled by the Boston Redevelopment Authority. He submitted information regarding Article 80. The Boston Zoning Code requires the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), the City's planning and economic development agency, to review the design of real estate developments and their effect on the surrounding community and the City as a whole. The procedures and standards for this review appear in Article 80 of the Zoning Code.

There are four different types of review as a part of Article 80. Large Project Review applies to virtually all major projects in Boston. In most locations, Large Project Review applies to projects that add at least 50,000 sq. ft. of gross floor area.

Small Project Review requires design review by the architects of the BRA's Urban Design Department for projects that are too small for Large Project Review but are larger than a minimum size. In most locations, Small Project Review applies to projects that add at least 20,000 sq. ft. of gross floor area or at least 15 dwelling units.

Planned Development Area (PDA) Review and Institutional Master Plan Review examine long-range plans that are required for developments in certain areas. Planned Development Areas (PDAs) are overlay districts that establish special zoning controls for large or complex projects.

A Citizen's Guide to Development Review Under Article 80 of the Boston Zoning Code may be downloaded at [http://www.cityofboston.gov/bra/PDF/Documents/A Citizens Guide to Article 80.pdf](http://www.cityofboston.gov/bra/PDF/Documents/A%20Citizens%20Guide%20to%20Article%2080.pdf)

4. Boulder, Colorado has a very good set of urban design guidelines for their downtown. Three review bodies are primarily responsible for administering these guidelines. They are the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board (LPAB), the Downtown Design Advisory Board (DDAB), and the Downtown Management Commission (DMC).

LPAB is responsible for reviewing all exterior and site feature changes for preservation, restoration and new construction projects located in the Downtown Historic District. DDAB is responsible for reviewing all exterior projects and site features with a construction value of \$10,000 or more in the non-historic area and the neighborhood interface area. Project review is mandatory while compliance with design recommendations that result from the DDAB review is voluntary. The DMC reviews the design of projects that extend into the public-right-of-way on the downtown Boulder mall such as outdoor eating areas, signs, awnings and other elements.

City planning staff (Planning and Development Services) is responsible for receiving recommendations and findings from the appropriate LPAB, DDAB, or DMC design review and incorporating them into the appropriate staff or Planning Board memos that are part of the city's development review process.

5. In Charlotte, North Carolina, the Urban Design Plan adopted in January 1990 provides guidelines for uptown development. A hard copy of the guidelines has been requested.
6. The City of Madison has a number of helpful documents that explain the development process to developers, neighborhoods and policymakers. *Development Guide-Land Use and Construction Approval Processes* describes land use approvals, the construction permit process and provides other helpful development related information.

Participating in the Development Process is a 41-page document that describes participant roles in the development process, pre-application and the formal application process.

The City of Madison has six different Urban Design Districts, some with their own set of urban design guidelines. A map showing the districts is available on page 23 of the *Development Guide-Land Use and Construction Approval Processes* mentioned above. A copy of the *Urban Design Guidelines for Downtown Madison* has been mailed to the Division of Planning.

7. Portland, Oregon has a Design Commission. The Design Commission uses the 177-page *Central City Fundamental Design Guidelines* to review new downtown development. These guidelines were updated in 2003.
8. The City of Seattle, Washington has a Planning Commission. In addition, Seattle has the Design Commission and the downtown Design Review Board. The Design Commission

was created in 1968 by the City Council. The Seattle Design Commission advises the Mayor, City Council and City departments on the design of capital improvement projects as well as projects on City land, in the City right-of-way, or constructed with City dollars.

The Seattle Design Commission has published a document titled *Handbook-Championing Civic Design Excellence in Seattle's Public Realm*. This handbook provides guidance on how to prepare for presentations to the Commission.

The downtown Design Review Board is responsible for reviewing the design of new buildings downtown. Design Review Board members discuss and weigh the merits of projects and proposed modifications, often recommending to the Department of Design, Construction and Land Use (DCLU) specific changes or departures from regulations in the Land Use Code as a trade-off for better design.

Design Review applications involve public notice and opportunity for comment. The final decision on Design Review is made by the DCLU Director.

9. Lee Alig recommended that the design review process in Indianapolis should be kept as simple as possible.
10. Someone stated that it is very important that information regarding design review be widely available, and petitioners should be encouraged to submit their projects as early in the design process as possible.
11. Tom Engle suggested that staff consult the Indiana Code [IC 36-7-4 1400 (Development Plans) and 1500 (Planned Unit Development) Series.] If changes to the design review process are contemplated, his information should help guide the changes.
12. Harold Rominger suggested that there are seven factors to take into consideration as the sub-committee reviews the design review policies of other cities and prepares a report for the Urban Design Oversight Committee. They are:
 1. **How is information regarding the review process distributed to developers and the public?**
Of the cities reviewed, the two best examples seem to be Madison with the documents *Development Guide-Land Use and Construction Approval Processes* and *Participating in the Development Process-A Best Practices Guide for Developers, Neighborhoods and Policymakers* and Seattle with the document *Handbook Championing Civic Design Excellence in Seattle's Public Realm*.
 2. **What level of design detail does the review process deal with?**
Since the meeting, staff has received *Urban Design-Guidelines for Downtown Madison*. These guidelines are limited to 16 broad topics.

The *Downtown Austin Design Guidelines* cover 44 Issues including public art and the closing of downtown streets.

Boulder's *Downtown Urban Design Guidelines* cover 68 topics including such detail as the use of innovative railing designs to define outdoor spaces.

Portland's *Central City Fundamental Design Guidelines* cover 29 topics including such detail as the use of rooftops.

3. **How comprehensive is the design review process? Is all development within a certain boundary reviewed or are the standards for public development or private development only? Is development within the public right-of-way reviewed?**

The *Downtown Austin Design Guidelines* seem to cover all development within the boundaries established for the guidelines.

In Boulder, the Downtown Design Advisory Board is responsible for reviewing all exterior projects and site features with a construction value of \$10,000 or more in portions of the downtown outside of the historic districts.

The Seattle Design Commission reviews the design of capital improvement projects as well as projects on City land, in the City right-of-way, or constructed with City dollars. New residential and commercial development meeting the following thresholds is subject to design review downtown.

DOC-1 & DOC-2 (Downtown Zones)

	use	threshold
office		50,000+ s.f. gross
residential		20+ units
other		50,000+ s.f. gross

DRC, DMC, DMR, DH-1 & DH-2 (Downtown Zones)

	use	threshold
office		20,000+ s.f. gross
residential		20+ units
other		20,000+ s.f. gross

4. **What is the legal basis for the design review process?**

In Portland, compliance with the *Central City Fundamental Design Guidelines* is required before the building permit process may begin.

Boulder requires design review based on the *Downtown Urban Design Guidelines*, while compliance with design recommendations that result from the review is voluntary.

In Seattle, the Design Review Board makes recommendations, based on the *Design Review Guidelines for Downtown*, but the final decision on Design Review is made by the Department of Design, Construction and Land Use Director.

The *Downtown Austin Design Guidelines* suggest that the Austin guidelines could be integrated into the administrative mechanism in several ways:

- Some of the guidelines should become part of the City of Austin Code through an ordinance process. The City of Austin Legal Department in consultation with the Design Commission and other appropriate City staff could structure guidelines that best lend themselves to codification. The existing code requirement for retail space at street level for parking structures in the downtown area is an example of a guideline that lends itself to codification.
- Some of the guidelines may not be appropriate for codification and may be more effective as policy. Such guidelines could be adopted as official general policy by the City of Austin, or as departmental policy by the planning and/or public works departments.
- The guidelines could be adopted by the City and applied to the City's own building projects, whether such projects are building projects or civil projects.
- The guidelines could be adopted by the City and integrated in matrices for the evaluation of public/private projects or private projects seeking public financial support. The Smart Growth project evaluation matrix is a good example of guideline integration into an evaluation matrix.

The policies and regulatory context for development sites and proposals evaluated by the downtown Seattle Design Review Board are the Downtown Plan, the Seattle Land Use Code and DCLU Director's Rule 20-93 on Public Benefit Features.

5. Who does the actual design review? Is the review done by public officials, a planning commission, city staff or a special design review commission?

In Austin, the Design Commission reviews projects, but is assisted by City staff from the Neighborhood Planning and Zoning Department.

Boulder has three review bodies in their downtown area. City planning staff (Planning and Development Services) is responsible for receiving recommendations and findings from the review bodies and incorporating them into the appropriate staff or Planning Board memos that are part of the city's development review process.

The Urban Design Commission in Madison has staff that assist in the review of projects.

In Portland, the planners within the Office of Planning & Development Review (OPDR) and the citizens appointed to serve on the Portland Design Commission and the Portland Historic Landmarks Commission conduct the design and historic design review processes.

6. What components are necessary to provide the best review process? What is the right amount of review and public involvement? How long should the process take?

The urban design process in Madison can take from 5-9 weeks. The Urban Design Commission can decide cases with only appeals going to the Plan Commission.

In Portland, the review process varies with the type, size, and location of the proposal. Smaller proposals are initially reviewed by staff and the process generally takes two to three months. Larger proposals are reviewed at a public hearing with a process of about three to four months. Owners of nearby property are notified and testimony from individuals, organizations, and neighborhood associations is encouraged.

The Seattle design review process includes the following 6 steps:

- Pre-application conference,
- Application for early design guidance process,
- Early design guidance meeting,
- Interim review,
- Master use permit application, and
- Design review board meeting.

7. **What city has the best design guidelines in terms of ease of interpretation?**

Most cities accompany guidelines statements with drawings and/or photographs as illustrations.

The Austin guidelines seem to have the clearest format. Each includes the following:

- **Guideline Number**
- **Guideline Statement** - An abbreviated statement of the guideline meant to announce the main idea of the guideline.
- **Issue** - Short narrative states the need for a guideline, and may give certain verbal examples of the problem.
- **Values Supported** - References each guideline to which *Shared Values for Downtown* (listed in the Introduction section) are supported by this guideline.
- **Examples** - Photos or graphics from Austin and elsewhere that help illustrate the main point of the guideline.
- **Recommendations** - Specific recommendations on how to accomplish each of the guidelines. Some references may be made to other guidelines or City of Austin ordinances already in place.

13. Harold Rominger presented a hypothetical guidelines form that provides an overall structure for the guidelines for the Indianapolis Regional Center. Included on this form is a listing of the unwritten guidelines that Division of Planning staff currently uses as a part of Regional Center review. (A copy is attached.)

Future Meetings

For the next Policies and Procedures Sub-Committee meeting, staff will prepare and

distribute a survey that will poll sub-committee members on their opinions regarding recommended changes to the Indianapolis Regional Center design review process.

Next Meeting - The next meeting of the Policies and Procedures Sub-Committee will be Monday, November 7 at 11:00 a.m. at the BSU CAP:IC at 22 East Washington Street.