



Agenda Item #:	7
Project Title:	Confirming the format of Urban Design Commission meetings for 2024 (virtual vs. in-person)
Legistar File ID #:	80702
Members Present:	Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Jessica Klehr, Shane Bernau, Christian Harper, Marsha Rummel, Rafeeq Asad, and Wendy von Below
Prepared By:	Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Summary

At its meeting of November 29, 2023, the Urban Design Commission confirmed the format of Urban Design Commission meetings for 2024.

The Commission discussed the following:

- The one thing that really hit home to me is that we have 23 meetings next year, and even if we decide to go in-person the maximum amount we can actually do is seven times. This is about consistency, this is about the number of the status quo pros and cons that are noted. I hope you've had the chance to think about it now that we have done both and welcome comments. I would really like to hear from everybody on how it has gone.
- I might be in the minority, but I despise Zoom meetings. It is very difficult. It's very hard for me personally. Today, my camera kept turning off for some reason – I don't know why. There are a lot of little things, it just takes away from the meeting. I know it is long sometimes, but I think that I get more from it when we are in-person and interact with people instead of squares on the screen and I can see materials. For me I prefer in-person.
- I'm the newest person, so I have had not a whole lot of a chance to be with everyone in-person. I agree that it is kind of nicer to get to know my fellow commissioners. That said, when it is cold and dark outside and I don't have to walk alone to my through my creepy empty state office building to my lower level to get to my car, I do not miss that. I was going to ask, I get the whole consistency and access and technology and we only have seven meetings, is there a possibility to say that we have an in-person meeting once a quarter and then the remainder are virtual? We can only meet seven times anyway, can we make those seven be once a quarter or some regular rhythm that makes sense and the remainder be virtual? I don't mind either format.
- (Secretary) I think for right now, the reason we have gone through room reservations and calendars and the way that it shakes out, all of the times we have a room, are immediately at the beginning of the New Year, in June we do not have a place to meet. From June on we would have to be virtual. For right now, there is not an opportunity to say once a quarter, because we do not have a place to meeting in person. That is not to say that when we have a hybrid option available to us, which I really do think is coming in 2025, I think that at that point we cannot require folks to come if we have a hybrid option, but if the Commission wanted to say once a quarter we do need to get together in-person we could revisit that conversation at that time.
- I am pretty much ready to just go back to virtual. In all seriousness, there are pros and cons with both. I do want to know who is more important than us though and why we cannot get a room. But I guess in all seriousness, I do think and hope that we, I appreciate the point about consistency. Even for me today, I had a panic moment, not knowing where I should be for the meeting. I think the public that is banking on coming to us, I think if we

are adding stress for them to figure out where we are, I just hope we can err towards consistency. I would be open to this sort of rhythm idea, I agree that it should make sense, I don't know what that would be though.

- I kind of have mixed feelings. My response is when I am in-person, I don't hear what is discussed I am hearing impaired and that room is awful and if I don't sit strategically, I miss some of the conversation. I catch everything on Zoom. So, for me it is better to be on Zoom, but I am certainly willing to come in-person. It sounds like the hybrid meeting is the answer. I believe it is nice to have the personal relationships and the treats are good. Also, the last couple of meetings like Julie had to spend her time at the door because somehow we don't have the ability to keep the door unlocked. I know that she is supposed to be here taking notes. And the whole AV thing where we started late, luckily there was a guy somewhere to come. There are not even enough plugs for everyone to plug-in. I am sounding negative about being in-person, but will do whatever we decide, but for me I do prefer Zoom meetings.
- No surprise, I have spoken about this before, I am pro meeting in-person. I can certainly respect the pros and cons, but neither way is perfect. We have technological glitches with Zoom meetings and technological problems when we meet in-person. Though when we did have our original big room, which is not available to us anymore it seemed liked tech problems were minimal. It is just unfortunate that things played out that that room was not available to us. I was kind of disappointed when we voted to go back to in-person and I am fully aware that we ended up voting in favor of that and just because it was on the schedule. I think if everybody had been there at that meeting it probably would have stayed Zoom, but it was what it was and we voted to back in-person. Then it seemed like forever before we actually had one. I can see the confusion with both developers, the public, and even us of doing this hopscotching back and forth. As much as I like meeting in person, if a whole year's worth of meetings is only giving us seven in-person that just seems kind of ridiculous. I am sad that that is the case because I believe in meeting in-person and think that part of what we are doing should be a face-to-face interaction. I have had a couple times speaking to people, and they have experienced the Zoom meetings and they made derogatory comments about hiding behind a screen. I am not hiding, that is the format of the meetings. I have noticed no change in people that are willing to come to meetings from the public comments in Zoom versus in-person. That argument doesn't wash at all. My impression is that the developers like to speak to us in-person. I am sure there is extra time and cost involved, but given the monetary scale of these projects, I am not particularly sympathetic towards that being a financial convenience consideration for them. Sorry. So I am pro meeting in-person, but I will bow to the reality and logistics of whatever we feel we have to do to keep having these meetings. If it is vote one way or another, put me down for in-person.
- We are a public commission and we are addressing the public, and the industry and I think that the phrase hiding behind a screen is a strong one. I believe that there is also inequity in staying on the screen, not everyone has WIFI. I have gone back and looked at recordings of our meetings and you don't get to see any of our faces. There is a big disconnect there. We are basically public activity but it becomes anonymous when we are on Zoom. I am wondering what do people see while the meeting is going on, but not in the recording?
- (Secretary) Whatever we are seeing everybody else is seeing. When we see them and they can see us. The Zoom is focused on my screen share, which is why they don't see you guys when everything is happening via Zoom. When we are meeting in person, they don't see anything. They just get a recording. I have received comments from staff and elected officials about how the bare minimum for the public record is a recording. The virtual meeting allows a clearer public record, including when we are pointing to things on a screen. When we meet in-person that does not carry through. When folks go back to the recordings, they get lost in the conversation versus the Zoom. While we are discussing, some of our more frequent flyers when we transitioned back to in-person meetings, we have been collecting comments from both development teams and the public that took issue to going back to in-person meetings citing convenience and cost-benefit factors.
- I would be more sympathetic to the neighbors and alders who are juggling multiple meetings versus a developer that doesn't want to fly someone in on a 300 million dollar project. But we are here to serve the residents of the city, not the development community.
- I would be concerned that maybe they can game the system a little bit, in saying that in-person meetings are this one and this one, we are going to plan to submit for virtual meetings. There is more inequity there.

- (Secretary) I won't say that has not happened because it has. I have had applicants submit for specific meeting dates knowing that the meeting was virtual.
- It sounds like to me though that there still needs to be some progress on meetings in general. What gets recorded, how it gets recorded, whether it is Zoom or in-person. That we don't really have that fine-tuned in any format quite yet, starting with we cannot get a room. There are more issues than whether we are in-person or in Zoom. There is more work to finesse in getting these meetings in better shape.
- I think we should push for Council chambers. It can be hybrid. The Plan Commission meets there. The point about capturing visuals as part of the public record is really important. And then we could be there in person, and it would be captured because it would be hybrid, so you get the benefit of both. If I can help push for that let me know. We should be there. Hybrid needs to be now, not in 2025. The reason I raised my hand, when we started doing Zoom it was because of COVID and we were worried that we couldn't show the public's face because somebody might flash, but that doesn't happen. Can't we ask in the short term to allow people to show themselves as part of our meeting? At least so we know who we are talking to and vice versa.
- That is a great idea. I don't know what the options are. If someone did something inappropriate, we have people here that can instantly turn them off.
- (Secretary) That is a great question. With regard to Council chambers I believe there is a pre-determined contract for the City's use of Council chambers because it is technically the County's building and the Board of Executive. So, I didn't know if that contract is renewed every year but they agree to a certain amount of uses, but something that I can inquire about. Room 151 will be occupied until next November. IT is currently starting to outfit Room 215 and will be doing 151 following. So we will have two hybrid set-ups in the MMB. Those are slated to come online in 2025. I do think there will be more options for us. I know every time I have asked about Council chambers I get shut down quickly, but can certainly ask the question again. Other rooms in the CCB, I was told that we could reserve those rooms, but that County staff and boards or commissions have precedence.
- There has to be other rooms we could do hybrid?
- (Secretary) Those other rooms would be in-person meeting options only, including those in the CCB. The Mayor's Office also noted that our meeting locations need to be consistent when meeting in-person.
- We used to take dinner breaks and meet until 11 PM or 1 AM, this meeting is going longer than it could have but the last meeting went only three hours and that was a long meeting.
- This is really good conversation and feedback and I am wondering regardless of how we end up voting that maybe we should revisit this next year at this time when there may be some new options available to us. Certainly we cannot just at the drop of a dime, seems like we have got to cue it up in advance.
- To the dinner break point, I have one comment, when we are in-person you can quickly run out to use the restroom versus on Zoom it is immediate rapid fire. If this is a 10 PM meeting we are just going back-to-back with no breaks. Sometimes that's an eight-hour workday starting at 4 PM. That is tough to sit through without bio breaks or movement.
- I would appreciate suggestions or a motion for breaks. We can certainly do that.
- We are looking for a motion to confirm the format of the Urban Design Commission meetings in 2024.

Discussion on the motion:

- Can we try to see if we can see participants' faces on the Zoom meeting?
- Yes, that would be good to add as part of the motion that staff look into the feasibility of allowing applicants to activate their cameras.

Action

On a motion by von Below, seconded by Knudson, the Urban Design Commission **VOTED** to meet virtually in 2024 based on the comments about being open and transparent to the public so that they have consistency, and on the conditions that (1) we revisit the format at the latest this time next year but sooner if a hybrid option became available, and (2) staff looks into the feasibility of allowing applicant's to activate their cameras.

The motion was passed by a vote of 5-3 (von Below, Knudson, Klehr, Rummel, and Goodhart voting yes, and Bernau, Harper and Asad voting no).