

AGENDA # 1

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION **PRESENTED:** August 4, 2010

TITLE: Development Review Process – Discussion **REFERRED:**
 and Recommendations Based on a **REREFERRED:**
 Communication from Tim Cooley,
 Director of the Economic Development
 Division Regarding the City’s
 Development Review and Approval **REPORTED BACK:**
 Initiative (18121)

AUTHOR: Alan J. Martin, Secretary **ADOPTED:** **POF:**

DATED: August 4, 2010 **ID NUMBER:**

Members present were: Richard Wagner, Henry Lufler, Marsha Rummel, Melissa Huggins, Jay Ferm, Mark Smith and Todd Barnett.

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of August 4, 2010, the Urban Design Commission **DISCUSSED AND FINALIZED** with comments and recommendations the City of Madison’s Development Review Process. Staff briefed the Commission on the number and types of projects reviewed by the Urban Design Commission. Staff initiated discussion with the suggestion that staff could approve some of the sign variance and minor modifications to uniform package applications rather than bringing them to the full Commission, as well as the potential of forming a subcommittee to meet every 30 to 45 days to review sign applications, leaving the Commission to deal with more “meatier” subjects. Tim Cooley, Director of the Economic Development Division spoke to the need of suggestions and comments from the Commission. He stated they are hoping to have all the suggestions put together for the Economic Development Commission for their August 18, 2010 meeting, with public meetings and listening sessions starting August 25th. Comments from the Commission were as follows:

- In thinking about some of the signage things we see, a lot of times they are in for a very specific ordinance reason (variance), but often we end up talking about the whole quality of the sign, which is interesting discussion but doesn’t really deal with the real reason they are on the table. Maybe there’s some way we can try to speed some of those things through that would let us focus more on major projects.
- We need to take note of why something is on the agenda and try to stick with that.
- Empower staff’s ability to keep items off the agenda when the submittal is not complete, or a return submittal where the applicant has not brought all the information forward that we mentioned at the previous meeting.
- I want staff to be able to look at a submittal and if what we need is not there, it’s not on the agenda. That word will get around quickly. That’s my biggest sticking point.
- The idea of a sign sub-committee is a good one. The frequency might be an issue.
- The better prepared the applicant is the better off we all are.
- Developers would save a lot of time and money if they came in with simple concepts.
- Specific language in the application for developers to come early and come with ideas would be helpful.

- Self-critique at a 6-month interval would be helpful for us. Do we think we did a good job, went to fast, how did the project turn out?
- We've gotten better at direction over the last couple of years; however we can clarify what is expected wouldn't be a bad thing.
- Our meeting duration doesn't serve anybody well. Ways of slicing and dicing our workload so our main meetings are more manageable would be really good.
- Incorporate signage into the architectural review more vigorously.
- The ideas of training Commissioners are really good. A mentoring system for the first 6 months to a year would be very helpful. A one year "on ramp" process for new members.
- Reduce referrals by making sure applicants provide the information we request with further consideration of a project.
- Before and after boards (presentation) – having boards to refer to helps us make our decisions.
- An annual review by the Commission would be helpful to keep us in tune with our process.
- Some sort of PC/UDC interaction, once or twice a year would be a good idea. It's frustrating for us to spend a lot of time on a project that then gets blasted by the PC. Working on something amicably would save everybody time. (For example, the Landmarks/UDC joint meeting regarding the Edgewater.)
- Probably 75% of citizen comments aren't relevant to what we do here. We are early in the process and many of the public comments we receive are more aimed at the Plan Commission part of the process.
- Would very much endorse applicant(s) coming early and have it be a participatory process. Somehow getting that information out there is very important.
- Communication is very important. What one committee person might find important might not be for another.
- Anything we can do to bring down the length any agenda(s), either by subcommittee or administratively, would be really important. Empower staff to make decisions that don't need to come up to the level of the Commission.
- In regards to neighborhood input, there are some very strong neighborhood associations and some really fledgling neighborhood associations. If we want to hold participation to a particular standard then we need to provide them with the expertise and guidance. We should have a clear neighborhood process that's the same for every neighborhood.
- Signs are the visual representation of our built environment. I hesitate to say they are nothing compared to something important or big. I think we do an important job for our city with these signs (review).
- I think ultimately Fire (access) drives projects in this city.
- We're the front end of this process so we don't get the intensely detailed reports from Planning staff. We sort of wing it. If there's some way to get preliminary reports that might be helpful.
- If we're more of a collaborative process, can we let more than one voice have the back and forth the way we do with the applicants?
- We need to make sure neighborhoods know all the ways they can be involved and get their message across.
- There should be a way to deal with façade grants that doesn't involve the entire Commission.
- I think the Fire Department has been great to work with.
- An expedited review service makes me nervous, because what's being shortchanged? If the City's going to simplify things, it's only warranted if the developer is coming extra-well prepared. I don't see how we're going to maintain quality if we're shorting the process. We have to put more resources into it so we don't shortchange the process.
- Part of why we spend so much time on a project is because there are good architects and there are bad architects. Is there something the development community could do on their end to up their game? If you're going to rate our process then we should be doing the same thing with the developers.

- We need to document who gets approvals in two meetings, and who gets approvals in five meetings, and why. If that was part of the conversation that would really improve the game as well, on the developer side of things.

Cooley thanked the Commission for their comments and suggestions and reminded them that if they have anything further to add to please get it to him by August 15th.

ACTION:

No formal action was taken on this item; comments were made by individual Commission members regarding the Urban Design Commission's role within the development review process.