



Agenda Item #: 7

Project Title: Discussions and Information Related to Future Amendments to MGO Chapter 33.24 - Urban Design Commission Ordinance and the Urban Design Commission Policy and Procedure Manual

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Members Present: Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Lois Braun-Oddo, Shane Bernau, Christian Harper, Jessica Klehr, Rafeeq Asad, and Amanda Arnold

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Notes

The Commission discussed the following:

- Nothing about the current statement that I find relevant or meaningful, it's ambiguous and talks about all buildings in the city and protecting aesthetics in the city, which is very lofty. I think we can better define our role.
- The existing statement isn't accurate, we don't review all buildings. It should address that we deal with gateways and priority areas; I think it needs a level of geography associated with it.
- The existing doesn't distinguish between purpose and intent. I think we should separate purpose and intent.
- Critique of existing statement's item 1, assure the "highest quality" of design—I think that's too lofty. I don't think that's ever happening because we're working with what we get as proposals. I see our purpose as more like moving the needle because we're not designing things for applicants. They're coming in with a base project, and we're trying to help improve it. I don't think for most projects we are ending up with the highest quality design possible.
- The phrase "property value" was used a couple times, which is interesting. I think we want to focus more on helping applicants create a unique sense of place, neighborhood character, and pedestrian realm. Part of our role is protecting the public interest in private development projects.
- A good phrase in the existing is in the last point where it talks about the future. Looking at the current status and keeping in mind the future and growth of the city too. Trying to think long term is an important part of UDC.
- Not being influenced by the latest trend, gimmick, or style
- Includes knowing the history of the city too. I like the word "future" and keeping that as part of our goal.
- I agree that we should qualify where projects are located in our charge. I'd like to see the word "advocate" for responsible and quality design (not "high-quality" design). That also goes toward our charge of the permanence of what architecture should be. I like the phrase "foster civic pride" because that's important, it's not just a building on a site, it's a neighborhood or greater Madison. I'd like to somehow include that because I think there are a lot of our projects that the whole city is partaking in in some way, it's an important charge we have.
- Aspects of the existing statement come across as awkward, not as relevant as they were. The opening part uses the phrase "must be controlled," which gets dogmatic.
- I found the AIA Framework for Design Excellence helpful. It included nice, maybe oversimplified, but straightforward comments about good urban design. It used phrases that started with "Good design..." does this. That's a great simple comment about what we're striving for. The four principles of good urban design from NYC had nice, concise things to say, including "Good urban design reinforces the sense of place of a neighborhood." That sentiment could be included in what we come up with.

- I hope the purpose and intent statement is short. We're going to have design recommendations and requirements for each UDD where we can get into the nitty gritty. This should be something with 2-3 bullets for purpose and 2-3 for intent. It will lose its impact if it goes on and on. I also think that wherever we can "require" instead of "encourage," that will be helpful and give the commission some teeth, along with clarity for applicants.
- For me, the most difficult ones to interpret and enforce will be related to equity because we're primarily looking at building design, and while equity is certainly an important issue, it's really a social function and social issue. I'm not sure we can both promote a building design and say without reservation that it is or is not equitable. I'm not sure that's our role.
- I agree and don't want to take on more than we can handle or say we do more than we do. We could have a simple statement: By creating a good public realm, we create a high-quality environment that creates access for all. Maybe how we address equity is to create a quality environment that all have access to. I think it's important, but we need to get to it in a different way.
- I agree and when we say things such as review projects for consistency with the Comp Plan and local adopted plans, the Comp Plan takes equity into consideration for sure.
- I definitely disagree, I think when we look at urban design and architecture, that's the role. Architecture's role, from philosophy, is to create a place where desire can live. Then add urban design to it, you are creating places for people, so equity is definitely part of that. Look at affordable housing, where they throw up a boring, cheap building with no ornamentation that uses cheap materials and low design because it's not market rate. We have a role to talk against that, and that's what we do. I don't know that it needs to be an elaborate statement, it can be consolidated into something, but we definitely play a role in that.
- This reminds me of the project by Oscar Mayer where some of us insisted on it not being approved - because it was affordable housing, we wanted it to be a high-quality environment. We didn't have our arms twisted because they had certain rent so we'd forget any other criteria we'd typically have for market rate. I think if we keep in mind the things you mentioned about the design of buildings and public realm that will by default be equitable.
- For the overarching issues or statements, I'd say that one is communication and participation between developers, neighbors, and city staff early in the design process. We see projects wanting approval without an Informational Presentation, and that's not the most successful way to go. The process is always better when we know neighborhood meetings have taken place. If we know developers have to meet with alders, neighbors, and City staff, that gets people together before they come to us, which is good and we do by default. Another one is consistency with the Comp Plan and local adopted plans. Those plans help us when it comes time to make a finding. We may have pressure from neighbors, but we do go back to those plans to say that this is consistent with them. Prioritizing places over objects was mentioned earlier. Permitting flexibility in the application of our requirements. The overall place, overall project design, not really what the most in trend design statement or style is—this is a place more so than an object. In terms of intent, I think it should be stated that our standards and guidelines are not meant to be overly prescriptive or inhibit innovative design or creativity, they are there to serve as the minimum necessary to ensure that the redevelopment meets our purpose.
- I really like the last part.
- We advocate for aesthetic quality, we facilitate communications before all of those people, we review for consistency, we require cohesive and high-quality design. Again, we'll have guidelines and requirements in UDDs to talk about specific design-related issues.
- I think what you said was succinct and makes sense to me. That sounds like good basis to move on from. It hit everything we've talked about. Maybe those become the purpose and intent, then we get into the guidelines.
- We didn't say anything about sustainability and equity, but I think those can come later. Certainly we need to encourage and do everything we can to allow those things to occur. Like earlier comments about the highest level of design, we can go on and on and put roadblocks on development, but it is not equitable and not sustainable for city overall. We can't be up on our ivory tower passing judgment because it offends our sense of aesthetics.

- We advocate for good design to the benefit of the general public. We do have to recognize that urban design is for everyone and not just for people in the neighborhood. One thing that was touched on is that we do advocate for equity in a lot of different ways, and I think it could be one of those layers we add, along with sustainability. I think we do advocate for that even though there are certain things we can't do. We can't tell a developer how much to charge for something, so there are limits, but we can affect equity.
- With equity, maybe we can affect the participation of more people in the design process. See if we can bring more voices as registrants to the process or to participation in neighborhood meetings and things that affect design early. We can advocate for that and ask developers to show us what they did for their outreach.
- This idea of the public realm needs to be in that succinct statement. One of the four bullets in the NYC article was about transportation and moving through a city, and to me that all comes back to the idea of the public realm. We can review projects, we can improve projects, and the building may be really well-designed and beautiful, but if it crams a pedestrian against a sidewalk of heavy traffic in order to create space for itself, then it's not good urban design. So this idea of the public interest, public realm is a phrase that absolutely needs to be emphasized.
- I agree. I'm in support of including sustainability and equity, but I want to make sure we say how we'll do it so it's not disingenuous. We'll achieve this by doing this and this. It holds us more accountable, which is important.
- Regarding the public realm and geography, if we were to advocate for the aesthetic quality of the city's public realm and gateways and endeavor to balance the interest of individual projects with the desire for welcome and cohesive neighborhoods and districts that would talk about geography. We don't always review projects in a UDD, maybe it's a public building or residential building complex, in those cases we're looking at helping put together a welcome and cohesive neighborhood, sometimes it's a district and sometimes a neighborhood that the project sits in.
- Are we looking to have something that is structured like the purpose and intent? I get feeling that we're leaning toward having two separate parts, a succinct purpose and an intent that would articulate that purpose and what we hope this purpose achieves. Then we could get into details about the issues of sense of place, access to movement, etc. How UDC positively impacts projects and those we serve, this is what we want the above to foster and advance as far as intent. Or one rolled into one overarching?
- As long as those themes are incorporated with the bullets on the statement of purpose, I think we're good. The handout has three main criteria: Consistency with Context, Character, and Adopted Plans; Sustainability and Equity; and Design Elements. There are 16 items, and it was suggested that we boil it down to 5-6 things.
- I propose that statements 1, 17, and 18 clearly and broadly cover what I've been hearing as the most important points. 1- Comp Plans, 17- facilitate communication early in design process, and 18- endeavoring to balance the good of the public realm. Those seem strong. Others get into more detail.
- Earlier comments about how these matters of public concern must be controlled—I think we'll find a softer language for that. Maybe "matters of public concern must be reviewed in order to promote interest" rather than controlling.

Action

On a motion by Asad, seconded by Braun-Oddo, the Urban Design Commission **APPROVED** the next steps in creating the purpose and intent statement, which includes staff working with the Chair to craft language and then bringing the language back to the full Urban Design Commission for review and approval. The motion was passed on a unanimous vote of (6-0).