Seattle design Commission

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APPROVED
MINUTES OF THE MEETING

February 04, 2010

Convened 1:40pm
Adjourned 4:30pm

Projects Reviewed

Pedestrian Scale Lighting Standards
Citywide Design Guidelines

Commissioners Present

Mary Johnston, Chair
Andrew Barash
Brendan Connolly
Julie Bassuk
Graham Black
Lauren Hauck
Laurel Kunkler
Julie Parrett
Norie Sato
Donald Vehige

Staff Present

Guillermo Romano
Valerie Kinast
Tom Iurino
Jenny Hampton
Tim Trujillo

February, 4, 2010

Project: **Citywide Design Guidelines**
Phase: Draft
Last Reviewed: N/A
Presenters: Cheryl Sizov, DPD
Vince Lyons, DPD

Attendees: A.J Yang, SCIDPDA
Michael Jenkins, Council Cultural Staff

Time: 1.48 hours

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SUMMARY

The Design Commission thanked the team for their great presentation and commended them for their work. They commented on the ease of reading the document and also thanked the team for bringing the guidelines for review. The Commission appreciates that this document references large concerns such as sustainability and transit. The new guidelines encourage designers to step back and look at the bigger picture, including the neighborhood context, natural conditions and potentials of the site. Commissioners appreciate DPD taking this more proactive tact as opposed to aiming the guidelines at just mitigating negative effects. The Commission recognizes that these guidelines have significant design ramifications and they understand that clashing issues around adopting new green measures within an existing regulatory framework are inevitable. The Design Commission would like the team to consider the following comments:

- **Include more emphasis in the guidelines on simple, cohesive, larger concepts. Aligning these larger concepts and the program well is essential to good design.**
- **Encourage the designer to be intentional and have a concept for the open space and not just provide greening of the remnants of the site as an afterthought.**
- **Consider moving the subsection on open space design to the beginning of the open space concept section, C4.**
- **Promote the idea of flexible open space. Programming the open space less can offer more to the users in the end.**
- **If the project has an art component, recommend that the artist be involved at the conceptual level. The art development and project design can both profit from early collaboration.**
- **More strongly encourage designers to draw from the site surroundings and site characteristics as they approach the design.**
- **Although drawing from the existing plantings on the site may be appropriate in some cases, the guidelines should acknowledge that most sites are urban and do not have native vegetation that can be emulated. Also, reconsider whether encouraging moving established trees is a desired guideline.**
- **Further encourage designers to think about the quality of the street and the interface of the project with the street. Although the proposed guidelines address this, be even stronger about requiring attention to the public realm.**
- **Include guidance on integrating transit stops into the design. Depending on the location and volumes of the stop, it may be a good opportunity for placemaking on the site.**
- **Encourage design of buildings that are flexible in their use over time. .**
- **Promote the use of the most state of the art materials and technology to make projects sustainable, such as pervious paving. Require designers to address issues of maintenance and consider educational components.**
- **Provide more guidance on energy components of design and climate responses.**

- **While Commissioners understand that sustainability is meant to permeate the various sections of the guidelines, a new section, C6, may be warranted to provide clarity and punctuate the importance of sustainable building practices.**
- **Provide strong guidelines on accessibility/universal design.**
- **Some Commissioners find that placing the resources bar into each section is helpful and some do not find it necessary and would rather see just one comprehensive resources section at the end of the document.**
- **References to relevant CAMs could be useful.**
- **It could be helpful to reference more resources, such as the Bicycle Master Plan. Because the online guidelines will be a "living document" that can be continually updated, expanding the number of resources referenced might best be done there.**
- **The Commissioners agree that having two checklists, one for the city wide guidelines and one for neighborhood guidelines, is a good solution, and believes the reference guide that illustrates how the sections of the citywide guidelines correspond with the neighborhood guidelines will be helpful to designers and Design Review Board members.**

Project Presentation

In the 1970s and 80s, SEPA was adopted which changed project review. In 1980, the mayor helped develop the master use permit. Notices were unified and standardized. A new multifamily code was developed in 1982 which had very prescriptive standards. A downtown plan was then developed which was very thorough in its guidelines. There was very little early involvement by the public or the city. The Comprehensive Plan was introduced in the 1990s.

Design is an iterative process that arrives at a solution. The adoption of the design guidelines in 1994 was important.

These were originally drafted in 1993 and 1994 but have not been touched since. This document became the bible for the boards to reference. The team concluded that it is difficult to create a single document for such a diverse audience. They had to ask how best to reach each of the groups of users the most effectively.

There is a checklist on the back of the booklet that the boards have used as a backup when using the guidelines. The team stated that they are looking for a way to streamline this while modernizing the document.

The Design Commission reviewed the Design Review program a few years after its creation but it was basic in terms of how the document was functioning.

The last review of the program was done at the city auditor's office. One of the results was that the design guidelines were difficult to use. This was an item that neighborhoods used to draft local guidelines to augment and create further unique characteristics. The programs history now has enough to draw upon.

There were no resources to change neighborhood guidelines. Downtown and Belltown guidelines were left alone. The question became, "How do we bring these up to speed as green building and transit are becoming growing issues not covered in the guidelines?"

The City of Seattle hired Weinstein A|U to aid in the update of the Design Guidelines. To begin, the team came up with principles by which to draft these guidelines. They were as follows:

- Design guidelines need to be clear to be an effective tool.
- They must facilitate the design process and the review process. The team looked to mimic the iterative design process. They felt the guidelines needed to be timeless and timely.
- Make sure that revisions would be made carefully to reflect the careful nature of the original.

The team found that people mostly added to issues with the neighborhood guidelines and focused on the public realm. They also found that the explanations and graphics needed to be updated to reflect the times. When the

original guidelines were completed, the primary design issues centered on scale and context. There were redundancies in the text. Even a lack of hierarchy was noted within the guidelines. The melding of process and review were also noted in the study as weaknesses.

Weinstein A|U presented three options to DPD and from those DPD elected to choose a hybrid of two of the options.

Cheryl Sizov next explained the layout of the new set of guidelines. The new guidelines are as follows:

A: Context and Site
- A1. Natural Systems and Site Features
- A2. Urban Pattern and Form
- A3. Architectural Context and Character
- A4. Access, Circulation, and Connections

B: Public Life
- B1. Public Space
- B2. Walkability
- B3. Activity
- B4. Transit

C: Design Concept
- C1. Project Uses and Activities
- C2. Massing
- C3. Architectural Concept
- C4. Open Space Concept
- C5. Materials

Early on it was clear that the previous mayor wanted to bring sustainability into the guidelines. The team wanted to bring it in a stronger and more visible way. They wanted to infuse sustainability throughout the process.

The team has come to the Commission for ideas that can help aid in this objective. The team feels as though they have landed on something they feel meets the objective. There has been no public review as of yet. Public comment will be open through March. The team has decided to go lean in this document. They believe that most people are using online tools which have proven to be helpful in keeping information up to date. Clients are also becoming more likely to access this information online.

Commissioners' Comments & Questions

Thank you for the history. You talked about construction numbers, was there was talk of a measure of success from a design point of view.

We have gone over this several times. We started to do it with a design review story board where we bring experts to evaluate the process. The proof would be in the happiness of the public. Appeals have dropped from 49 a year to 3. One of the things that came out is you can't measure what you don't keep track of. Our team has been making efforts to create an online tool to review the evolution of these projects. Good notes at the meetings are important as well.

My first impression is that this document is awfully light. I like that this is stylistic and modern.

I liked seeing additional resources. I like repetition. What I was hoping to see in terms of more repetition was ADA information which is very useful. On page 11, in Site Features, perhaps provide a link about client assistance memos (CAMS).

Under materials, perhaps mention the importance of signage in terms of way-finding as well as maintenance.

I think it was very easy to read. I think you made the right decision to incorporate sustainability throughout the document.

I think one consolidated table about neighborhood guidelines would be useful as opposed to several that must be referenced. Will there be a checklist as well? Perhaps two checklists, once concerning which set of neighborhood guidelines are to be used and well as one for the board.

Yes, that will be included in the final version.

I didn't feel that the public life goal was carried throughout the document. The public life terminology didn't cue me.

In good design, we see projects that try to be everything to everyone. There wasn't terminology that suggests simple, elegant solutions.

Is there any interface between the design guidelines which reference how the street relates to its function?

I appreciate your comment because we met with DPD and we were excited about the possibility of marrying this with the city's goals with right-of-way.

In the section about access, I appreciate the all inclusive nature of the document, but the resources sometimes don't reference entities that possibly should be.

I appreciate the holistic nature. One underrepresented area is energy strategies. I'm not sure how there might be a sort of hierarchy which prioritizes some of these issues.

I think there is definitely room for more attention to this issue. It's just a matter of obtaining the knowledge to include some of this. Your comments are very helpful. We feel as though some conflicts that arise may be resolved at a level which may provide a more satisfying solution for the players.

The new guidelines are very accessible and useful. It seems like there can be overlap. I thought reference to the CAMs was helpful. There wasn't a lot of content concerning artwork that might need to be further addressed. Under plants and habitats, perhaps rewording the plants and habitats section would be helpful. Perhaps transit and cycling should be separated since they have different needs. Some bullets incorporate too much information that could better be addressed in two bullets. Additionally, perhaps qualifying some of these bullet points would be helpful. Finally, perhaps give primacy to open space by placing it first within the section.

It would be great if we could include "accessibility" throughout the document.

I think this is a terrific baseline. Regarding an earlier comment, I think that energy warrants its own section.

The ground is fertile for energy issues as there has been a sea change in terms of energy issues.

Is there mention of reuse, and adaptive reuse?

We mention it once and it is only slight.

Consider design and height issues when looking at prominent locations.