

City of
Gainesville

Inter-Office Communication

Community Development
Station 11, Extension 5022

Date: March 26, 2002

To: Wayne Bowers, City Manager

From: Tom Saunders, Community Development Director *TDS*
Dean Mimms, Chief of Comprehensive Planning *DLM*
Lawrence Calderon, Chief of Current Planning

Subject: Design Review Options

This memorandum will set forth several design review options for discussion at the City Commission's April 4, 2002 workshop on design review. The City has committed itself, through the Urban Design Element, to adopt additional urban design standards, and the Community Development Committee and staff have requested this workshop in order to have a discussion and guidance from the City Commission as staff updates the Land Development Code. This memorandum includes pertinent provisions from the adopted Urban Design Element of the Comprehensive Plan, describes several options for design review of development plans, and proposes a list of features and characteristics that could be subject to a design review process.

Background

The pertinent goal in the Urban Design Element is Goal 1, which reads as follows:

Goal 1

Protect and promote quality of life and livability for the citizens of Gainesville through quality urban design.

The policy which most clearly mandates a new step beyond the existing review process is the requirement for design review of large buildings, as follows:

Objective 1.8

Guide large, corporate, national chain sales and service establishments toward a design that promotes the unique character and identity of Gainesville.

Policy 1.8.1

By 2002, the City shall establish land development regulations that control wall articulation, entrance orientation, building colors, location, drive-throughs, building

setbacks, location and amount of parking, side and rear facades, number of stories, outdoor lighting, building footprint, compatibility with context, and quality of materials for large, retail and service establishments in a manner that promotes civic pride, unique identity and land use objectives. Implementing this policy will mean adding a design review process and standards not currently existing, aimed at increasing the “local character” and quality of our larger new buildings.

In addition, various policies require urban design standards in appropriate parts of the City. This language could be viewed as merely imbedding in the Comprehensive Plan, the changes already made in the Land Development Code – namely, the recent adoption of generally pedestrian-oriented site planning rules for particular parts of the City that have pedestrian character or potential. The City has adopted a basic set of site planning rules for Traditional City, transitional standards for the Central Corridors, and more detailed plans for special areas such as College Park and University Heights. The Plan East and SW 13th corridor studies may lead to planning overlays for those areas. The objectives and policies that follow could be implemented by further such fine-tuning of rules for various areas, such as establishing guidelines for particular regional activity centers in order to encourage a park-once, transit-oriented and pedestrian character for those shopping areas, consistent with the vision in the MTPO’s Livable Communities Reinvestment Plan.

Objective 1.1

By 2003, the City shall adopt urban design standards in select locations in the city. Any adopted urban design standards shall reflect the particular character of that portion of the city, and shall reflect that the city includes transitions in character from urban to suburban. In general, the most comprehensive set of urban design standards should be applied to those areas which were built before World War II, which contain design elements that were common before World War II, or which are designed primarily for pedestrian activity, in addition to bicycle, transit and car travel. The City should also seek to establish these traditional, pedestrian-oriented quality-of-life design features in other areas when the need is identified. The City shall review its existing urban design standards for the Traditional City and Central Corridors as to appropriate boundaries, and establish urban design standards for other particular areas of the city as appropriate.

Then the Element proceeds to indicate how to identify which areas might warrant such standards, as follows:

Policy 1.1.1

Indicators of traditional, pedestrian-oriented, urban areas appropriate for urban design standards should include some or all of the following characteristics:

Building facades pulled up close to the street, facing the street, and generally aligned.
Relatively high-density mixed-use, compactly laid out to accommodate walking.

- A mixture of housing types or prices.
- Multi-story buildings.
- Connected, narrow streets, or streets with modest turning radii.
- A connected network of sidewalks.
- Mature street trees lined up along the street.
- On-street parking.
- Off-street parking at sides or rear of buildings.
- Narrow, smaller lots.
- Front porches.
- Garages subservient to primary building.
- Short block faces.
- Terminated vistas.

For areas that have some or all of these features, the Element then describes the approach to be taken, as follows:

Policy 1.1.2

The City shall establish urban design standards, which protect and promote quality of life, in order to encourage redevelopment and new development within city limits rather than in outlying areas by amending the City Land Development Code to adopt additional urban design standards for any particular parts of the city.

Policy 1.1.5

By 2002, based on the indicators in Policy 1.1.1, the City shall prepare an analysis of any additional areas where urban design standards shall apply in order to create livable areas designed for comfortable travel by walking, bicycling and transit, as well as car, in order to protect and promote quality of life and create a sense of community in those areas.

The Urban Design Element also calls for an educational component, by providing design information to neighborhoods, citizens and developers, as follows.

Policy 3.18.1

By 2002, the City shall publish an Urban Design Toolbox. The Toolbox shall provide an array of urban design tools, which may be used when developing or redeveloping in the city, in order to promote livability and best urban design practices.

Design Review Options

One threshold question to decide is what design review should apply to. Just largest buildings, say over 10,000 square feet? Also, development in specified activity centers?

The other key design issue facing the City is a process one—whether to institute a design review board or adopt another process. Some options follow.

Option 1. Development Review Board (DRB)

The DRB, per Sec. 30-352 of the Land Development Code, is the citizen board that reviews and approves or denies development plans submitted for its review pursuant to Article X. of the Code. The board is composed of seven members appointed by the City Commission. Per Sec. 30-352, any interested citizen may be appointed, but whenever possible, the board should include at least one member from each of the following: architect or landscape architect, civil engineer, a person engaged in real estate sales or development, and a professional with experience in natural or environmental sciences.

Amending the Code to require that design professionals be included on the board would enhance the design review capability of the DRB. Staff suggests that three members of the DRB must be registered design professionals (i.e., architects, planner or landscape architect) and that at least one of the three design professionals be a registered architect. The seven-member size of the DRB would not change. The three design professionals requirement could be met gradually as current members' terms expire, or by a date certain with mandatory terminations of DRB members with the least time (or most time) otherwise remaining in their term of appointment. Review of a mandated list of design features or characteristics would be provided to the DRB. That list of design factors would also be provided at the required (earlier) neighborhood meeting.

Option 2. Architectural Review Board (in addition to DRB)

The Code could be amended to establish a design review board (“architectural” rather than “design” chosen to avoid confusion with existing DRB) consisting of three design professionals and an engineer (civil, architectural, structural, or mechanical), in addition to up to three other members (five- or seven-member board recommended). The Architectural Review Board (ARB) would meet one week after the monthly DRB meeting to review architectural components of the development plans that were reviewed the previous week by the DRB. The DRB would review for applicable Code provisions other than the specified design topics listed elsewhere in this memorandum; the ARB could review solely design issues. Membership with DRB might overlap to assure continuity.

Option 3. Architectural Review Board (No DRB)

The City Commission could Eliminate the DRB, and establish a design review board consisting of three design professionals and one engineer as required members of a five- or seven-member board. Department staff would review development plans for Code consistency, and the Architectural Review Board (ARB) would review the architectural components of the plan. Design topics subject to ARB review are listed below in this memorandum. The ARB, like the DRB today, would have the authority to make recommendations to the City Plan Board on land development regulations either upon referral of the City Commission or upon its own initiative. This might reduce public input on other issues, however, that now get thorough discussion at DRB.

Option 4. Historic Preservation Board

Expand the purview of the Historic Preservation Board (HPB) to include architectural review of development plans outside of the historic districts. Membership requirements of this nine-member board would need to be changed (i.e., amend Sec. 30-355) to require that three members of the HPB be design professionals and that one be an engineer. Design topics subject to HPB review outside of historic districts are listed below in this memorandum.

This option, if implemented would be a substantial expansion of purview for the HPB, and would require the HPB to review from distinctly different design standards depending upon whether the subject development is or is not within a historic district.

Design Features and Characteristics Possibly Subject to Design Review

Build-to line and setbacks: relationship of buildings to the street and sidewalk edge and adjacent building

Building walls: materials, configurations, and techniques

Building elements: materials, configurations, and techniques

Roofs: materials, configurations, and techniques

Windows and doors: materials, configurations, and techniques

Building orientation: alignment and orientation on the site

Compatibility/Context: compatibility with surrounding area, including environmental resources and built features

Fences: materials, configurations, and techniques

Parking: location, screening

Public realm: space enclosure, lighting, landscaping, vistas, street furniture, outdoor sculptures, sidewalk seating, etc.

Sidewalk location and dimensions: sidewalk prominence, width, shading

Street geometry: including block length, street width, connectivity

Vista termination: views of the buildings from streets and sidewalks

Traffic calming: impact on traffic speeds, and mitigation offered

Pedestrian amenities (convenience, safety, comfort): street trees, porches, other features

Garage location (single-family and townhouse only): whether garage screened or recessed

Signage: location, scale

Transit compatibility: whether served, and transit-friendliness of design

cc: Ralph Hilliard, Planning Manager

DM/LC