

STAFF REPORT

TO: Design Commission
FROM: Richard J. Bruckner, Director of Planning and Development
RE: PUBLIC WORKSHOP ON DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR NEIGHBORHOOD
COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS
DATE: Meeting of September 8, 2008

RECOMMENDATION

- The staff recommends that the Design Commission review this report and the attached documentation and, after hearing public comments, provide input and preliminary direction to staff for preparation of draft design guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial Districts.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The City Council's work program for 2008 includes preparation of design guidelines for Neighborhood Commercial and Multi-family Residential Districts outside of Specific Plan areas. These areas are currently subject to design review based on the general Citywide Design Principles in the Land Use Element of the General Plan. Specific design guidelines for these districts have not been formulated to date. After a competitive process involving nine proposers, a committee of staff and Design Commission members recommended selection of Moule & Polyzoides, Architects and Urbanists to prepare the guidelines and the City Council approved this selection at its June 9, 2008 meeting. Another public workshop will be held on September 22, 2008 for the Multi-family Residential portion of this project.

The project involves the preparation of design guidelines for the affected areas (see map in Attachment A) as well as providing recommendations for the consolidation and/or streamlining of existing design guidelines in the six Specific Plan areas outside of the Central District. The process to establish new guidelines is outlined below. This meeting is intended to be a review of items 1 – 4 for the Neighborhood Commercial portion of the guidelines.

1. Consultant will review existing design guidelines and an identification of portions that could be applied to neighborhood-commercial and multi-family residential areas;
2. Consultant will conduct an illustrated evaluation of five previously approved and/or recently constructed projects—to be selected in consultation with City staff—in neighborhood-commercial zones, ten multi-unit residential projects, and five projects in specific plan areas outside the Central District (20 projects in total);
3. Conduct interviews with stakeholders in the design review process including neighborhood association presidents in affected areas, architects, preservationists, developers and realtors.
4. Public meetings with the Design Commission to present and to receive comments from the public, from developers, from local architects, and the Design Commission on the findings;
5. Consultant will prepare a summary of findings and preliminary recommendations for new neighborhood commercial and multi-family guidelines and new or amended specific plan guidelines based on an evaluation of existing guidelines and the 20 projects described above;
6. Consultant will preparation of a preliminary draft of the two sets of illustrated guidelines (multi-unit residential and neighborhood commercial) for review
7. Consultant will present working drafts of the two sets of guidelines at a public

- meeting with the Design Commission to receive comments from the Commission and the public (including developers and local architects);
8. Final revisions of the guidelines for presentation to the Design Commission and to the City Council; and
 9. Submittal of an adopted guidelines suitable for publication and for posting on the City's website (both printed copy and a digital version).
 10. Evaluation of existing design guidelines for areas with specific plans (excluding the Central District) to determine the extent to which these guidelines should be amended, updated, streamlined, or supplemented with newly developed guidelines for neighborhood commercial districts. This will include an analysis of each of the Specific Plan areas, and the North Lake Specific Plan area in particular, to determine whether the new guidelines address specific needs and circumstances in these areas.

This project does not contemplate changing existing development standards or design review thresholds that are established in the Zoning Code. The consultant may provide recommendations to the city for future Code changes.

STAFF'S PRELIMINARY DIRECTION

The following is a summary of design issues that staff believes should be incorporated into the new design guidelines:

- Unique Pasadena Environment: New development should consider the unique characteristics of Pasadena, including climactic conditions, landscape and lifestyle.
- Site Context: New development should consider the unique circumstances of the site and adjacent context with respect to building massing and siting. Building massing should avoid large, blocky facades and respond to the surrounding context.
- Quality and innovation: New development should continue the tradition of quality and innovation in design that has been a trademark of the city since its inception.
- Clear Design Concept: Project architects should provide a written explanation of the design concept presented, including a discussion of context represented by maps and photos.
- Design Language: Contemporary designs should present a logical, site-specific design concept. Traditional-based designs should communicate a contemporary interpretation of the traditional language from which the design is drawing, referencing proportions, detailing and materials historically applied. Traditional-based designs should not mimic historic styles in an attempt to distort the unique architectural timeline created within the urban context. Additionally, the guidelines should discourage the random combination of elements from multiple architectural styles. Guidelines should ultimately encourage a unique contextual architectural response for a particular site rather than be artificially driven by a pattern-book approach to design.
- Street Orientation: Buildings should have a street orientation with primary entrances at the street and service facilities (parking, utilities) shielded from public view as much as possible. Buildings should have a human scale.

COMPLETED WORK/REPORTS

Review of 20 recently built projects

City staff and architects from the Moule & Polyzoides team toured the city to review 20 recently built projects according to task #2 in the above referenced scope of work. This tour was productive, as it allowed us to identify specific issues and problems that could be addressed in the design guidelines as well as identifying those design elements that are working well and should be encouraged. The report that was generated from this review is provided in Attachment A.

Stakeholder Interviews

Staff contacted 90 individual stakeholders to participate in one-hour group interviews, which took place on Friday, August 29, 2008. Stakeholders included neighborhood association presidents in affected areas, architects, preservationists, developers and realtors. A total of 35 individuals participated in the interviews. A summary of comments provided by the stakeholders is provided in Attachment B.

Review of Existing Design Guidelines

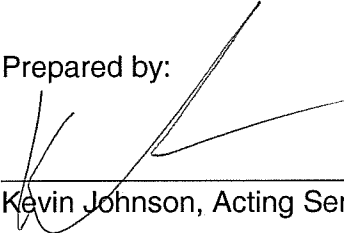
As directed in task #1 of the scope of work above, Moule & Polyzoides reviewed 15 existing documents related to design guidelines in the city and prepared a report to summarize those elements of these existing documents that could be incorporated into the new design guidelines. The report generated for this task is provided in Attachment C.

Respectfully submitted,



Richard J. Bruckner
Director of Planning & Development

Prepared by:



Kevin Johnson, Acting Senior Planner

Approved by:



Mark Odell, Senior Planner

Attachments:

- A: Report of Tour of Recently Built Projects (includes map of affected areas)
- B: Stakeholder Interview Report
- C: Review of Existing Documents Report