Agenda Report

DATE: July 24, 2006

TO: City Council

FROM: Cynthia J. Kurtz, City Manager

SUBJECT: Information on the City's Design Principles and Design Guidelines

RECOMMENDATION:
This information is provided as background to assist the City Council in their discussion of the City's design guidelines as requested.

BACKGROUND:
In response to a recent request from the City Council, the staff has compiled information on the City's design principles and design guidelines. The only structures that do not receive review are single family buildings outside of historic districts, residential buildings in RM-12 districts, and commercial structures under 5,000 square feet (this was reduced from 25,000 s.f. to 5,000 s.f. in 2005).

Attached is a complete list of the Design Principles & Design Guidelines (Attachment A), and the accompanying Citywide Design Principles (Attachment B). Currently, the City has approximately 30 sets of design guidelines. The guidelines fall into four categories: guidelines for use everywhere in the City, guidelines for specific areas, guidelines for specific uses, and guidelines for historic properties.

The Design guidelines work in concert with development standards. The development standards establish the "building envelope." They prescribe building height, front, side, and rear yard setbacks, and in many instances floor area ratios (how much can be build on any site), and encroachment plans. The development standards are incorporated into the zoning code or, if applicable, the specific plans.

The Citywide Design Principles, a statement of goals, policies, and objectives in the Land-use Element of the General Plan, apply to all design reviews in the City. These principles, first adopted in 1992 and expanded in 2004, are the foundation for all design reviews in the City. The guidelines targeting areas of the City are in the seven specific plans, redevelopment plans, and park plans. The guidelines for the specific plans are the most current and comprehensive. Using text and illustrations, they reiterate themes

in the Citywide Design Principles and offer specialized recommendations and direction. The remaining guidelines, which apply to specific uses, vary in length and age. The Design Guidelines for Signs and Awnings, adopted in 2004, are 18 pages in length; the guidelines for service stations are nearly 20 years old and one page in length. For reviews affecting historic properties, the municipal code authorizes the City to use the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Illustrated Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings. In 2002, the Council approved by resolution a companion set of illustrated Design Guidelines for Historic Districts. These guidelines are based on the Secretary's Standards.

The City has used the design principles in conjunction with design guidelines since 1992. This interaction between the principles and guidelines is described in the introduction to the Citywide Design Principles (Attachment B). In this introductory statement, developers and architects working in Pasadena are encouraged to begin their work by reviewing the principles and aspiring to craft new buildings that "complement the scale of the City and the quality of its finest architectural traditions." They are then encouraged to consult the guidelines to find "...options, solutions, and techniques to achieve the goal of excellence in new design." This introductory statement also explains the difference between development standards in the zoning code, which are mandatory, and design guidelines, which are applied with limited flexibility to allow creativity.

In addition to generating new and updated design guidelines during the past four years, the City has also expanded the scope of design review. The February 2005 zoning code lowers the threshold for design review of all new construction, outside the Central District and a few other areas, from 25,000 square feet to 5,000 square feet. The code also requires more intensive design review along seven "major corridors." Since 2002 the City has designated ten new landmark districts, where design review is required by code. Tables from the zoning code with the thresholds for design review are on Attachment C.

The design guidelines address the architecture of the building and the quality of the building materials without necessarily dictating an architectural style. For instance; the guidelines for windows in multi-unit residential projects are attached and address window type, how the multiple lights in a window are divided, how it should be set in the wall plane, and that they should include clear glazing.

The implementation of the design guidelines is a collaboration between the project architect, staff, and the Design Commission. Experience in design review has demonstrated that the design review process is most often successful when there is a client that understands and respects the process and is committed to quality architecture, and the architectural team is of high quality and has experience in similar projects. As an example, a project as important and complex as Paseo Colorado was reviewed and approved in an expeditious manner due to the high caliber of the development team.

To improve the quality of buildings constructed in Pasadena, the Planning & Development staff has begun to take a more active role in encouraging property owners and developers to select architects who have successfully completed projects in complex environments such as Pasadena.

Respectfully submitted,
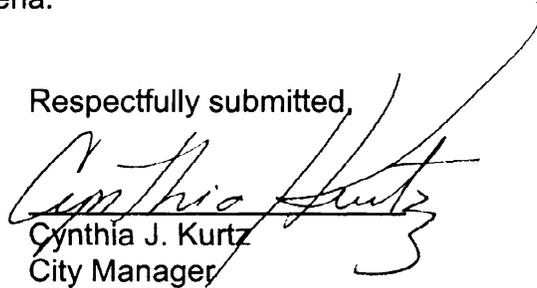
Cynthia J. Kurtz
City Manager

Prepared by:
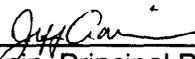
Jeff Cronin, Principal Planner

Reviewed by:

Richard J. Bruckner
Director, Planning and Development Department

ATTACHMENT A:
LIST OF DESIGN PRINCIPLES & DESIGN GUIDELINES, July 2006.

ATTACHMENT B:
CITY-WIDE DESIGN PRINCIPLES (General Plan)

ATTACHMENT C:
TABLE OF THRESHOLDS FOR DESIGN REVIEW (§17.61.030 P.M.C.)

ATTACHMENT D:
CENTRAL DISTRICT PLAN DESIGN GUIDELINES