

# City of Findlay Design Review Board

Municipal Building 3<sup>rd</sup> Flood Conference Room  
Thursday, November 2, 2017 – 6:00 PM

## Minutes

(Staff Report Comments from the meeting are incorporated into the minutes in lighter text. Actual minutes begin with the DISCUSSION Section for each item)

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Eric Anderson  
Pat Ball  
Jeff Fort  
Hardy Hartzell  
John Hunt  
Jerry Murray  
Dr. Wires

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Brad Weaver

**STAFF ATTENDING:** Matt Cordonnier, HRPC Director  
Jacob Mercer, HRPC Staff  
Alec Ochs, HRPC Staff

## CALL TO ORDER

### ROLL CALL

The following members were present:

Eric Anderson  
Pat Ball  
Jeff Fort  
Hardy Hartzell  
John Hunt  
Jerry Murray  
Dr. Wires

### Discussion

Matt Cordonnier welcomed everyone to the first working group meeting of the Design Review Board. The meeting started by reviewing the City of Findlay Ordinance NO. 2017-059 that established the board and the map.

Jerry Murray asked for clarification whether the group has authority over interior renovations. Matt clarified that the board only has the authority to oversee exterior changes. Jerry also wanted to know how the building owners would know about the design review district and its upcoming guidelines. Matt said that HRPC has reached out twice mailing information to every building owners and business owners to make them aware of the district as the ordinance went to Council. In addition, HRPC went out in September to photograph all the properties in the district to provide a baseline for what the buildings look like at the start of the Design Review District enactment.

Jeff Fort asked questions about minimum standard for what constitutes someone bringing a project before the Design Review Board. He felt that the standards needed more definition because they could be considered vague and that applicants would be challenge the Design Review Board in court. Matt said that the standards in the ordinance was left vague intentionally to allow the Board to create a guidelines document that will establish the standards that the Board will enforce.

Dr. Wires also brought up maintenance requirements asking what conditions were necessary to bring an issue to the Board. He worried that certain maintenance issues, such as damaged roofs, would be slowed down by the need to come before the board. Matt responded by stating there is a maintenance section that does allow owners to address immediate maintenance issues without seeking a certificate of appropriateness. Maintenance issues that are a threat to public health and safety should be remedied quickly.

Matt moved the conversation forward, reiterating the point that the Design Review Board is necessary because this Board now gives the city the ability to have a say in the aesthetic look in what is being done in downtown Findlay. He brought up the example of Legends, which was a restaurant that recently did a large exterior renovation in downtown Findlay. Before they did the renovations, nobody in the city had any say in what the building design looked like. Luckily, it looks nice, but we didn't have a say. The existence of the Board now allows our community to have a say in what is appropriate for our downtown.

Eric Anderson noted that the benefit to having flexible design standards was that different areas within the district have different standards. An area on the fringe of the district won't have the same review scrutiny that a project that comes in along Main Street.

Dr. Wires wondered about the ability for applicants to sue board members. Matt will double check with Findlay Law Director Don Rasmussen, but as a member of an entity established by the City of Findlay Ordinance, members would be protected from that. This is also part of the zoning code, so that appeals to this body would go to the Board of Zoning Appeals. Matt would also double check about fees for the Design Review Board.

Moving through the ordinance, there was discussion of the maintenance section. This should be a common sense, teamwork exercise with the board and applicant working through issues together. Once we get the board up-and-running, there will need to be a discussion about how to deal with maintenance in the future. Matt would rather start with the most egregious cases at first. In addition, the timeframe could be flexible to work with the owners to get certain elements addressed.

Matt reminded the board that the Historic Preservation standards from the original Design Review Board was removed from the updated ordinance. This will make the design standards more flexible for the applicants.

Eric Anderson brought up a personal example of a potential project, where he would demolish a building and put up a wall and parking lot. He wondered if that would be an appropriate project to review. Jerry and Matt agreed that these types of projects would be perfect for the board to see, because it falls under “any change”.

Matt reminded everyone that residential properties that exist in the district are exempt from the standards. Any new townhome development would be reviewed. He mentioned a recent City Planning Commission case, which is going to build eight new townhome units at a site in the Design Review District at the corner of S. West Street and W. Front Street. The board expressed interest in maybe having the developer come in as a “test run” with the board providing non-binding feedback to the developer.

Moving onto the guideline document, HRPC staff has worked to compile a draft document with recommendations for the Design Review Guideline document. These were inspired from surrounding communities such as Urbana; Lima; Downers Grove, IL, etc. This guideline book would be the document that applicants could access to see what is most desired within the district. These guidelines are not a rigid set of rules but instead give broad parameters to applicants to use towards their design.

The guidelines make suggestions on certain things to avoid, such as bright florescent colors, certain materials, inappropriate building sizes, inappropriate setbacks, etc. We are not trying to be a planned community such as New Albany, Ohio, where they have a highly detailed, 100+ page guideline with every building looking exactly the same. Unless it is a horrible design, we should help to make the best out of a bad design.

Going into the procedural part of the Board, we will run the Design Review Board as we would Planning Commission. Meetings would occur in the City Council Chambers and be open to the public to attend. The Design Review Board Administrator will write up a staff report to bring to the meeting with a summary of the project. This will provide the board with background information about the building and site to consider during their deliberations about the design.

For the board composition, we currently have eight (8) members on the board and we would like to have seven (7) voting members at each meeting. One member, Angela Debosky, accepted a new job so she will be unable to serve, and will need to be replaced. We will need to establish which board members will serve as “alternates” on the board. Matt will send out a roster with the terms that were given to the board members. Matt will send out the guidelines to the group and will give the group two weeks to send in comments and recommendations.

Next meeting will be on November 30, at 6:00pm.