

City of Findlay Design Review Board

Municipal Building 3rd Floor Conference Room
Thursday, November 30, 2017 – 6:00 PM

Minutes

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Pat Ball
Jeff Fort
Hardy Hartzell
Jerry Murray
Brad Wagner

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Eric Anderson
John Hunt
Dr. Wires

STAFF ATTENDING:

Matt Cordonnier, HRPC Director
Jacob Mercer, HRPC Staff

CALL TO ORDER

ROLL CALL

The following members were present:

Pat Ball
Jeff Fort
Hardy Hartzell
Jerry Murray
Brad Wagner

Discussion

Matt Cordonnier welcomed everyone to the second working group meeting of the Design Review Board. The meeting opened with Matt informing the group that he reached out to a lawyer from Toledo, Jeff Stopar, Esq., to review the ordinance and design guidelines for any potential legal issues and any sections that could be challenged in court. Matt then reviewed the timeline for the group, which includes meeting in early January to give the guidelines a final review before sending them to City Council for adoption.

Hardy Hartzell asked whether the City of Findlay had a historic district in the zoning code. Matt clarified that there is a historic district on record with the state, but there are no standards to regulate that district.

The group moved forward with the review of the Design Review Guidelines document. Jerry Murray and John Hunt provided their thoughts and edits to the group before the meeting.

The first change, which was applied throughout the document, was that we use consistent language for the Design Review District and the name of the document. We needed to match the language that was in the ordinance, so the name will be the "Design Review District". We do not want to include the word "downtown" in front of "Design Review District" because the definition of "downtown" can include an area that is outside the review district boundary. In addition, within the guidelines document, we will refer to the items in as guidelines instead of standards.

On page 4, we made a change to the document stating that the Board "will encourage" instead of "would like to assist". This was to make sure there was not any confusion whether the Board is responsible for designing the work for the applicants. The Board is there to review and comment rather than providing design work for the applicant.

On page 5, there was a long discussion about alleys. There was a statement that any façade that could be seen at "street-level" should be up for review by the Board. Jerry suggested that this should include alleys as downtown has several blocks of alleys that are seeing pedestrian activity. Brad Wagner stated that he believed that all businesses should have their dumpsters enclosed in an effort to improve the aesthetics of the district. Pat Ball wanted to make sure that we were not being overly restrictive on dumpster enclosures. For example, there could be areas within the District with buildings that do not have the space required to enclose their dumpster. Matt reiterated that this is part of the Board's responsibility to regulate with common sense to determine whether dumpsters need enclosed or not.

Matt reminded the group that the ordinance does not give the Board the authority to approach building owners retroactively to request they improve their building if the building does not have any maintenance issues. The existing conditions within the District provide a baseline for improvements.

On page 6, Jerry's suggestions that there be a list of items for applicants to provide the Board were approved. This list does not mean that every project must include all these items. The scale of the project would dictate how much information should be provided.

The changes regarding the 30-day period for review on page 6 were not kept because the ordinance states 45-days for review. The reason why 45 days was chosen originally was because we were worried that some applicants might try to avoid the review approval process. There could be a scenario where the applicant submits their plans too late and cannot be added to Design Review Board agenda for the next meeting. If the next month's Design Review Board meeting was scheduled after the 30-day mark, then the design would automatically be approved per the Ordinance standards. Matt envisions there will be some flexibility with the meeting times, but we wanted the Ordinance to provide cover in case these scenarios were to arise. Therefore, Jerry's change to 30 days reverted to 45 days.

Matt accepted Jerry's edits to the General Building Design section on page 7. Some of the

language in that section was subjective to the reviewer. Jerry commented that during the original Design Review Board, an applicant facetiously submitted a design for a building with gargoyles and overly dramatic design features. The intent of the ordinance is to have appropriate design features rather than extravagant architectural details. The statement of having “four sided architecture” was changed to have “Give equal emphasis to all exposed facades”.

There was discussion about the review of parking garage structures. John Hunt questioned a statement on page 7 that buildings within Design Review District should not be auto-oriented. Matt said the intent of the statement was to address the layout of the site by having the building in line with the street building wall rather than having a parking area on the right of way. Therefore, this statement was removed from this page because it is better covered in the massing section. The group agreed there could be gas station or drive-thru bank in the district depending on location and context of the site.

On page 8, Jerry included a section on design objectives to provide better flow of the document. Jerry asked about how we will review projects with these guidelines. Would it be the City Planning Commission method or like a checklist for each project and people rate the project based on certain criteria. Matt said he envisioned the City Planning Commission method where the projects are reviewed and approved subject to changes outlined by the board. For example, an applicant with a new building gets approved contingent they change the color of the doors to a more neutral color. Unlike City Planning Commission though, after the completion of the project we will have the Design Review Board Administrator go out and review to make sure that the agreed design features are implemented.

On page 11, the building materials section was revised because certain buildings materials, such as EIFS, can be acceptable in moderation. Pat Ball asked about whether facades in the alleys would have the same level of scrutiny in terms of materials. The group agreed that it would depend on the building location in the District, and that building facades on pedestrian friendly alleys would have higher level of scrutiny. There may be cases where certain materials might be permissible but the color scheme must be kept for all exposed sides.

The group approved of Jerry’s comments on the entrance section on page 18.

On page 20, John Hunt, indicated that the signage section had some redundancies. The intent was to convey that signage on awnings is appropriate, but we did not want the awnings to become billboards for the building. The plastic backlit awnings would probably not be permitted.

On page 22, the City of Findlay does allow sandwich board signs. Matt will check to see if the City has to approve the placement and location of the signs. Matt thought that if the boards were temporary, they did not need approval. Jerry asked why the sign in the picture was inappropriate vs. Logan’s sign is encouraged. Matt explained that the Logan’s sign was encouraged because it was an appropriate pedestrian scale. In the example, the inappropriate sign was a box sign and scaled for automobiles.

The group approved to move the example appropriate/inappropriate colors section to an appendix. This will allow them to be changed more easily in the future.

In the fencing section on page 26, the group agreed that the dumpster enclosures could potentially use some materials that are discouraged. Again, it depends on the location and context, but discouraged materials are not completely banned from the District.

On page 28, the planter box picture was removed to be replaced by a better landscaping example.

Moving on from the guidelines, Jake Mercer had created two flowcharts for the Board to review. One is a flowchart for a renovation or new construction project submitted to the Board. The second is for projects that have maintenance issues.

Matt ended the meeting with a discussion of fees for the board. Currently, if you start a project in the City of Findlay without a permit, the zoning officer, Todd Richard, would issue a "triple fee". We would like to have something similar but we do not have something established yet. Jeff Fort asked why there is a fee at all. Matt was not opposed to making it free, but there was fear that without a fee people would not come in to submit plans. We think that \$25 fee is appropriate because it is affordable and will not encumber the applicants.

In terms of website, Findlay City Council member Grant Russel, has created a webpage that will be on the City of Findlay website. We also have an email address set up that will direct emails to Matt and Jake at HRPC. HRPC will also be sending out letters to everyone in the Design Review District that the ordinance is in effect and that the guidelines are in place for any new buildings, renovations or changes to business structures within the district.

Next meeting will be in early January 2018.