



Planning Commission

Briefing on the Downtown Design Guidelines - Introductory Section (18.120.100s)

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Title

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Recommended Action

Information only. No action requested.

Report

Issue:

Discussion on the first section of the draft Downtown Design Guidelines.

Staff Contact:

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Presenter(s):

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Background and Analysis:

One of the first recommended actions to implement the Downtown Strategy (DTS) is an update to the Downtown design guidelines. These are regulations that help ensure new development and significant redevelopment projects achieve a level of design quality that is consistent with our vision as expressed in our Comprehensive Plan and Downtown Strategy.

Background

Design guidelines address functional as well as aesthetic issues. They influence site design, building orientation, massing, architecture and other building details, as well as historic preservation. They intend for development to be compatible with neighbors; promote safety, security and livability; be environmentally responsible; promote health and pedestrian activity; and upgrade the physical attractiveness of a development.

The City retained MAKERS consultants to assist with updating Downtown design guidelines. The consultant reviewed all comments received on the working draft of the update and a final draft was prepared for a final round of internal review by the current planning staff. Based on staff comments, and to address public comments that had been received on the first public draft, revisions have been made and a second public draft is now available.

Along with the proposed downtown design guideline update, staff proposes view protection measures guided by the Downtown Strategy, which will include amendments to Title 18, Unified Development Code, of the Olympia Municipal Code. Other chapters in Title 18 will require revisions to ensure consistency with the new design guidelines for downtown.

The draft guidelines are divided into four distinct sections, as follows:

- 18.120.100s - Introduction
- 18.120.200s - Site Planning
- 18.120.300s - Site Elements and Design
- 18.120.400s - Building Design

Analysis

The briefing on the introductory section covers the purpose of the chapter, applicability and procedures, Downtown Design Sub-Districts, and designated street types (see Attachment 2). The Introduction section sets forth the purpose and intent of the Downtown Design Chapter. The intent is to:

- Promote high quality urban design
- Enhance the pedestrian environment
- Activate the streetscape
- Reinforce the character areas identified in the Downtown Strategy
- Preserve the historic character of the downtown

The chapter identifies project review procedures that are unique to the downtown; the relationship to the procedures in Chapter 18.100 of the Olympia Municipal Code (OMC); provides a few definitions that are unique to this chapter; discusses the sub-districts and provides a map and description of them; and it incorporates the designated street types.

The Specially Designated Streets map includes identification of “Type A” and “Type B” pedestrian-oriented streets, which are currently included in Chapter 18.16 - Pedestrian Streets, of the OMC. Additionally, “Type C” streets are added, Waterfront Sites, and Downtown Entry Streets are identified. A few key “High Visibility Street Corners” are designated.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

There has been a lot of outreach to date, in order to develop the first public draft and in response to it. Because of staff changes and a delay in the project, there has been a significant amount of time between issuance of the two public drafts. For that reason, there will be at least a 30-day comment period on the second draft. Staff anticipates a third public draft, more public outreach, an open house, and several more briefings to the Planning Commission.

While staff does anticipate a fair amount of community interest, it is unknown at this point how significant the comments will be on the second draft or what, if any, new issues will be raised. To date most of the comments received have been around historic preservation issues, view protection measures, and the need to allow new development while maintaining the integrity of the downtown. People have asked about how some of the newer buildings in the downtown relate to the proposed guidelines, how parks and recreation needs will be met, and how to balance design requirements with the desire to keep housing units affordable.

Options:

None - Discussion only, no action required.

Financial Impact:

Funding for the consulting firm, MAKERS, to complete the preliminary draft was awarded earlier in the process. The work and that contract have been completed. The remaining work to complete the guidelines and related code amendments is part of the Community Planning and Development Department's base budget.

Attachments:

Project Webpage
Draft Code Section