



Land Use & Environment Committee

Downtown Design Guidelines Update

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Title

Downtown Design Guidelines Update

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Review and forward the Planning Commission recommendation to approve the Downtown Design Guidelines and Related Code Amendments to the City Council for consideration.

City Manager Recommendation:

Review and forward the Planning Commission recommendation to approve the Downtown Design Guidelines and Related Code Amendments to the City Council for consideration.

Report

Issue:

Whether review and forward the Planning Commission recommendation to approve the Downtown Design Guidelines and Related Code Amendments to the City Council for consideration.

Staff Contact:

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Presenter(s):

Joyce Phillips, Senior Planner, Community Planning and Development

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 the City's vision as expressed in the 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 Current Planning staff. Based on staff comments, and to address public comments that had been received on the first public draft, additional revisions were made and a second public draft was issued. City staff reviewed the second draft with the Planning Commission, Heritage Commission, Design Review Board, and held an Open House to solicit comments. A final round of revisions were made to address the additional comments received and the public hearing draft was issued, of which the Planning Commission recommends approval, without revision.

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

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 require revisions to ensure consistency with the new design guidelines for downtown.

The public hearing draft of the Downtown Design Guidelines and the Related Code Amendments are available on the project webpage.

A topic of discussion for the Planning Commission during its deliberations of the draft amendments focused on how the proposed amendments impact climate change efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, specifically related to energy use in buildings. These comments were primarily centered on provisions around building modulation and increased opportunity for energy loss at building corners. While building modulation is not always required (it is included in a list of menu options that developers can choose to use as a way to break up building mass and increase aesthetic interest), it is of interest and concern. The Commission did not recommend any specific revisions to the text in the proposed amendments but did express concern about how energy use and greenhouse gas emissions are addressed in new construction and how design guidelines relate to those issues.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

Community participation has been a large part of the development of the draft guidelines. Staff from the City and MAKERS worked with a Technical Work Group and held public meetings to gather input and prepare the draft guidelines. Additional outreach was completed to ensure revisions to earlier drafts met the expectations and needs of those who provided comments.

An Open House public meeting was held on January 23, 2020. Ten people attended the meeting and the written comments that were received were considered by the Planning Commission before making its recommendation.

Options:

1. Accept the Planning Commission recommendation to approve the Downtown Design

Guidelines and forward to the City Council for consideration.

2. Accept the Planning Commission recommendation to approve the Downtown Design Guidelines and forward to the City Council for consideration, along with any additional comments.
3. Remand the Downtown Design Guidelines and Related Code Amendments to the Planning Commission to reconsider noted issues or comments of the Committee.

Financial Impact:

Funding for the consulting firm, MAKERS, to complete the preliminary drafts 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