

City of Gig Harbor Planning Commission and Design Review Board
Minutes of Joint Work-Study Session
February 15, 2007
Gig Harbor Civic Center

PRESENT: Commissioners Jim Pasin, Joyce Ninen, Dick Allen, Theresa Malich, Jill Guernsey and Jeane Derebey. Commissioner Harris Atkins was absent. Board members Darrin Filand, Rick Gagliano, John Jernejcic, Charles Carlson, Rosanne Sachson, Jim Pasin and Victoria Blackwell were present. Staff present: Tom Dolan, Jennifer Kester and Diane Gagnon.

CALL TO ORDER: 6:05 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

It was decided to postpone approval of the minutes of February 1st, 2007 until the next meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

1. **Kurt Latimore, The Latimore Company** – Presentation and discussion on the upcoming phases of improvement to the design review process.

Chairman Theresa Malich expressed appreciation for this work study session and for everyone present and introduced Kurt Latimore from the Latimore Company.

Mr. Latimore explained the phased design review process improvement initiative. He illustrated the process with a PowerPoint presentation. He went over the agenda for this evening's work session and the background of the assessment report of April 2006 that led to these proposed improvements. Mr. Latimore talked about how design review sets the pace for the Community Development review process and how the current process works. He went over the two phases of improvements and the timeline proposed for completion of the initiative. Mr. Latimore then explained the legislative process and how the changes will be implemented. He explained the batches of amendments within Phase 1 and what may be included in each of those batches. He turned the floor over to Jennifer Kester to explain Batch A.

Ms. Kester explained that Batch A was some small incremental improvements that seemed to make a difference and would gain some momentum and make a substantial change. She went over the landscaping requirements and how they work currently and the proposal to remove the nursery stock portion from the design manual and enforce it under the zoning code. Ms. Kester then talked about single family residential setbacks, noting that the Design Review Board cannot modify setbacks and suggested that they be removed from the design manual. She went over the next suggestion for change which was the noticing requirements for DRB meetings. The final modification that she discussed was tree protection barricades. She explained that the current requirement for wood post holes damages trees and that metal fence poles are less expensive and not as damaging and therefore staff was proposing that the requirement be changed. Ms. Kester then opened the floor for audience comments.

Jeff Bucholz said that he had gone through the design review process and it had taken a long time and that going to the board is a nice option for people if you have a lot that has some restraints as it gives some flexibility. He expressed that we would hope to maintain that opportunity.

David Boe spoke and said he sits on the City of Tacoma Planning Commission. He said that on the Planning Commission side of things it is your job to be sure that this revision complies with the Comprehensive Plan or you need to modify your Comprehensive Plan. He noted that when you go through the design review process you find yourself not necessarily meeting the goal of the Comprehensive Plan. He said that it says encourage mixed use structures but the zoning code and design manual precludes that from happening in the downtown. Mr. Boe emphasized that a decision needs to be made whether that should be kept in the comp plan and if so then change the code to allow it. He noted that in one area it says we don't want parking on the waterfront but then it doesn't allow underground parking garages, which doesn't make sense. He stated that the prescriptive path does not necessarily make for a great building and added that he felt that the DRB was handcuffed when that should be the place where you look at the project in its entirety. He said that sometimes the prescriptive requirement may not be applicable.

John Holmaas spoke and said that he was going to have some projects coming through the process. He voiced concern with the requirement that states that you cannot top trees. He said that he was concerned that people will become violators as they will want to maintain their views. He said that he believed the property owners should have the right. He then spoke about a project with a 1972 flat topped building that probably did not meet all the design requirements. He stated that this building is within the enhancement corridor that requires complete screening from the freeway. He said that he didn't understand the requirement for screening in a commercial area that is already visible. He requested that they examine the visually sensitive areas to allow for redevelopment of these areas.

Randy Ghaul stated that he had a couple projects come through the city. He encouraged developing a way to see what the history had been in order to learn the interpretations currently used. He used the example of the lot width calculation being a looping calculation and that there may be another way. He agreed with David Boe and said that what the city is shooting for may not be what they are getting. As an example he pointed out that one of the allowances is that you can place a garage in the setback if you comply with certain design standards which leads to low slung box. He voiced his support for changes to the retaining wall requirements.

David Fisher spoke about the design review process saying that the two paths are very distinct and that the prescriptive approach is more reliable. He said that he felt that going to the board should be more out of the box. He suggested that if an applicant has determined themselves that they need to go to the board they should be allowed to go to the board within a month of their submittal and then the DRB can give thumbs up or thumbs down and then you return to the DRB within a week or two for final review. He emphasized the need for the process to be more flexible and faster.

Scott Inveen talked about his experience with the DRB, he supported the change in the noticing requirements stating that the current noticing requirements put his project out three months because he missed a meeting due to snow. He suggested that perhaps the public notice was not

even required since they are not really allowed to comment at the meeting but rather at the hearing examiner meeting. He referenced the City of Redmond process which allowed for constant review and he felt that it was faster. He said that when he came to the DRB meeting he brought an architect that sat on a DRB in Seattle. He felt that the board had very little direction and that there seemed to be a sense that the DRB is trying to show staff that they don't know what they are talking about. He added that staff currently does not have the power to keep the DRB on track. He stated that he had witnessed the DRB discuss turning radius and other inappropriate issues. He said that in Seattle staff keeps the DRB in line and if the Design Review Board gets out of line staff removes them from the room and explains what needs to happen. He noted that the DRB can stop the process and there is no way for staff to override them. He illustrated that the DRB actually said that he had brought the best architecture they had ever seen yet they still denied his proposal which only illustrates how off base the process is. He also said that the applicant before him was just a retaining wall and he stated that it seemed that staff was fully capable of reviewing those types of issues.

Ms. Malich asked for comments or questions from the DRB or the Planning Commission. Dick Allen said that he had done some additional studying of the manual. He noted that in the Historic District which is mostly within the height restriction area, the height limit is 18' but the height restriction area is 16'. He asked staff why this was the case. Ms. Kester stated that the Historic District has a requirement for 6/12 roof pitch and that was the reason for allowing the 18'. She noted that if you had a flat roof building you would have to stay within the 16'. She stated that one of the items suggested for discussion was some changes in the Historic District and that this would be discussed within Phase II. Mr. Allen asked about the paragraph on maximum height. Ms. Kester said that she believed that the basic structure was to promote the architectural character of downtown Gig Harbor. Ms. Kester said that other people have also asked questions about this section.

David Fisher said that he had done a house in the Historic District and he noted that a lot of the area is R-1 and they have a minimum lot size. He said that a lot of the Historic District is only 50' wide lots and there are requirements in the zoning code that conflict with the design manual. He said that the two requirements don't mesh.

Mr. Latimore stated that on March 1st staff will have some proposed language for the Batch 1A items and that they are hoping to hold a public hearing on the 15th. Ms. Kester noted that on March 1st staff will go into more detail. Ms. Kester reminded everyone that all of the future meetings will be joint meetings with the DRB and the Planning Commission. She noted that they are Planning Commission meetings so DRB attendance is not required; however, their attendance is encouraged.

Mr. Pasin said that Mr. Holmaas had brought up the issue of screening along Hwy 16 and the DRB had faced that on a number of projects and it continues to be a difficult item. He said that he would like to see us get this into the list of changes. He added that he felt that it had a priority. Ms. Kester said that the idea with Phase II was that we would hold another kick off meeting and prioritize those issues within Phase II. Ms. Malich said that she remembered the discussions about the screening of the highway and the community wanting to keep the corridor green.

David Boe said that he felt that the discussion about the Hwy 16 screening was really important. He offered to come to a meeting and go through real life projects and what the effect of the requirements would result in. He said that there needs to be some mechanism for correcting errors in the code without going through a laborious process. He gave an example of the large parking requirements for a mini-storage facility.

Mr. Pasin said that a number of people have commented on retaining walls and that he would like to ask everyone to attend the meetings to give specific input or give written suggestions as to how they can solve the issue of retaining walls. Mr. Pasin asked that staff could provide some written documentation of what the system is in the City of Redmond. Ms. Kester said that she would get in touch with them and find out.

Mr. Gagliano said that Mr. Holmaas had mentioned the remodeling of existing buildings and pointed out that there is no section in the manual that deals with that issue. He also noted that the list of typologies should be revisited. Ms. Kester said that was intended to be a part of the items addressing the bulls-eye approach. Mr. Gagliano thanked everyone who spoke tonight for the feedback.

Mr. Allen asked Mr. Boe if he had any suggestions about what may work better for the buffer requirements along SR16. Mr. Boe asked if the buildings are screened why it would be required to meet the requirements of the manual. He then suggested that topography should be a consideration.

Linda Gair said that the screening on SR16 screens people from pollution and noise as well. She pointed out that the cement walls are ugly and she felt that the screening was important.

David Fisher addressed Mr. Gagliano's comments about remodels. He said that a current project he is working on is a perfect example as it is more of a streamlined modern building within the Historic District and he is having difficulty meeting the design requirements and also matching the existing design of the building. He said that he felt that the bulk of design review will still go through the prescriptive approach but it is important to allow for more creativity if they go through the board.

Discussion was held on the schedule for upcoming meetings and everyone was encouraged to stay and have refreshments.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

CD recorder utilized:
Disc #1 Track 1
Disc #2 Track 1