



City of San Marcos

Meeting Minutes City Council/Planning & Zoning Commission

Thursday, June 25, 2020

6:30 PM

Joint City Council/P&Z Design Guideline Meeting

This meeting was held using conferencing software due to the COVID-19 rules.

I. Call To Order

With a quorum present, the joint workshop meeting of the San Marcos City Council and Planning and Zoning Commission was called to order by Mayor Hughson at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, June 25, 2020. The meeting was held virtually.

II. Roll Call **Council Members Present:** 6 - Council Member Melissa Derrick, Mayor Jane Hughson, Mayor Pro Tem Ed Mihalkanin, Deputy Mayor Pro Tem Mark Rockeymoore, Council Member Maxfield Baker, Council Member Saul Gonzales, William Agnew,

Council Members Absent: 1 - Council Member Joca Marquez and Mike Dillon

Commission Members Present: 8 - William Agnew, Mark Gleason, Matthew Haverland, Travis Kelsey, Kate McCarty, Gabrielle Moore, Betseygail Rand and Griffin Spell

Commission Members Absent: 1 - Mike Dillon

PRESENTATIONS

1. Receive a presentation from Staff and project consultants, Winter and Company, on the update to the downtown design guidelines; and provide direction to Staff.

Bert Lumbreras, City Manager, provided a brief introduction on the downtown design guidelines and standards. He mentioned that in 2012, the City contracted with Winter and Company to develop and adopt downtown design guidelines and architectural standards to regulate the look and feel of new buildings in the downtown area. Earlier this year, City Council provided direction to update those standards under the guidance of the previous consultants, Winter and Company. This presentation will address design issues, create new graphics to clearly illustrate the standards and the guidelines, and will tailor those standards to different contexts and areas within the downtown. Mr. Lumbreras mentioned that the city has been working to collect initial community feedback on the existing downtown standards by hosting 3 virtual focus group meetings and conducting an initial kickoff survey that was offered in English and Spanish and received approximately 550 responses from the

community.

Mr. Lumbreras introduced Andrea Villalobos, Senior Planner, with the Planning and Development Services Department to lead the presentation.

Ms. Villalobos explained that the purpose of the presentation is provide information to City Council and the Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z). Items to be discussed include the following:

1. Review the project background and scope.
2. Present initial community feedback regarding design issues and successes
3. Explain initial approach for key design topics
4. Gather input from City Council members and Commissioners regarding the design topics and design contexts
5. Explain next steps for the project and the next opportunity for community input

Ms. Villalobos introduced Nore Winter and Marcia Boyle of Winter and Company. Mr. Winter, President with Winter & Company stated 2012 they developed the Downtown Design Guidelines and Architectural Standards. These were built on top of recently adopted Smartcode (at that time) for downtown which focused on some basic building forms that established the basic shape and volume that was permitted in a range of building types. At the time, the City wanted to add a layer of context sensitive design standards that began to recognize that within the downtown district there are actually sub-areas where different approaches to design would be thought to be appropriate. That was a key part of the project in 2012. There were supplements to the code and a complementary design guidelines document intended to help in interpreting those standards and also when considering alternative compliance options.

Mr. Winter stated in 2018 standards carried over into the new development code, and Appendix A of the Design Manual and noted the map with the areas of different Design Contexts shown. He noted different strategies for height and massing and general design character were refined for those different sub-areas. That served as the starting point for the revisions that occurred in 2018. The city brought forward some of those standards into the new Land Development Code and expanded the range in which some of those standards applied particularly for some of those related to varied massing.

The design guidelines that have been written specifically for downtown were added to a more comprehensive design manual that includes guidelines for

historic preservation as well as for some other design areas within the city. Those are the ones that are currently used when reviewing new development in the downtown area. Mr. Winter stated that their work this year was to focus on the 2020 update and to look more closely at the issues that have been identified by the community based on concerns about some of the more recent developments, some of which has been considered to be successful and others that have raised issues, particularly about compatibility and how they reflected the character of San Marcos.

Focus of 2020 update:

- Include new standards to address design issues identified by the community
- Incorporation of new graphics to clearly illustrate the standards and guidelines
- Tailor standards and guidelines to various contexts within downtown

The key topics to be addressed include:

- Massing of larger buildings to promote compatibility with traditional downtown scale
- Articulation of facades
- Building materials
- Street level design that promotes a sense of place and activates the public realm
- Transitions from high density zones to sensitive edges

Marcia Boyle, with Winter & Company, highlighted the feedback received from the community. They met with the Historic Preservation Commission, Heritage Association, Main Street Advisory Board, Downtown Design Task Force and Downtown Association Board.

Ms. Boyle stated the feedback was similar at all three meetings plus the input from the community and the big ideas that came from these meetings include: Design excellence, Sense of place (design for San Marcos specifically), Four sided design, Visual continuity, Balancing old and new and responding to "context".

The detailed observations feedback included the following: Buildings are too long and monolithic, Parking opinions ranged from too much parking to too little, parking to parking not in the right locations, the scale of new buildings is too large - out of scale with existing buildings, views of the skyline are obstructed by new buildings, and lastly outdoor dining spaces are crucial.

Ms. Boyle shared the online survey results that was open for approximately one month in both English and Spanish. There were 549 responses. Outreach included Social Media, Press Releases, Webpage, Focus groups, and Downtown permit contacts.

The survey had the following questions:

Demographics showed that respondent were:

residents-69%, Texas State Student 8%, architects 1%, Developers 1%, San Marcos business owners 7%, and none or more than one of any of these categories 12%.

Trends the survey asked - How do you feel about the current trends in the scale of new buildings in the downtown area?

34% said very inappropriate, 31% said somewhat inappropriate, 11% said very appropriate, 17% somewhat appropriate and 7% were neutral.

Successful Projects the survey asked - What recent development projects downtown have had successful designs?

The top 10 responses include none (59), Cheatham Street Flats (21), The Local (14), Industry (11), Frost Bank Building Renovation (10), Old Justice Building on Guadalupe St Renovation (10), CM Allen Parkway / Riverfront Design (9), Aquabrew (7), Gumby's (6), and The View (6).

Design Issues the survey asked - What, if any, design issues related to building design do you see downtown?

The top 10 responses include the need for a consistent design (88), new buildings are too tall (84), scale/size (too large for downtown) (48), disruption of views and skyline (30), parking, materials and color (28), student apartments are an issue (26), traffic impacts of new construction (14), retaining and reusing historic buildings (10), and density is too high (9).

Other topics the survey asked - If there are any other building design topics you believe should be addressed in this project?

The top 10 responses include: maintain historic character, (31) parking, (30) sustainable building and site design, (19) building height, (18) pedestrian and bicycle friendly, (15) new building design, (15) green space/required landscaping, (12) prohibiting additional high rise apartments, (11) landscaping with sustainable, native plants, xeriscaping, (11) and infrastructure improvements (10).

Favorite attributes the survey asked - As you walk downtown, what are some of your favorite attributes?

The top 10 responses include: landscape beautification (78), shade/mature trees, shaded sidewalks (76), historic buildings (restored) and features (53), sidewalks and bike lane/paths (51), lively street scenes, including outdoor dining (47), small businesses/local feel/diversity in businesses (33), window shopping (31), courthouse and its lawn (25), murals and art (21).

The similar big ideas that came from both the focus groups and online survey include:

- Visual continuity and designs that are compatible with one another**
- Preserving and reusing historic buildings, and designing new buildings to be compatible with historic buildings**
- Maintaining the San Marcos identity and character**
- Addressing key topics including height, views, materials, sustainability, parking**

Mr. Winter continued the presentation to discuss the following design topics & analysis:

Massing - Existing guidelines are brief and high level and provide some additional detail but focus only on varied upper floor massing. Potential updates will include additional information and examples of how to apply varied building massing options and this will include options beyond varied upper floor massing. After a brief discussion by Council and Commissioners, the consensus was to include various massing with more detail such as the examples provided.

Commissioner Moore noted that buildings like this couldn't be built today because of the parking requirements. She believes that we need to lower our parking requirements and ask people to walk to where they need to go. Given that, how can we recreate this nostalgic area like we want? Mr. Winter said we may not see buildings such as those we have now, but we can learn from them. Most of those buildings were on narrow lot widths but the architecture can be translated to a larger building. It is true that parking is an elephant in the room for any downtown there is a transitional point of deciding to adjust parking ratios, it may affect the scale of the building, but from an architectural standpoint is not an important design guideline and we can address it. A storefront can wrap around the parking. For a parking level, there are other ways to make it interesting. That's why the issue of four-sided design is so interesting. People had commented on the blank walls along alleys that now we want people to walk there. Enhancing the pedestrian level will help support

revised parking policies. He can write a memo of related actions what will be outside of the scope of this project. He can anticipate how to make any parking facility more supportive of a walking environment.

Mayor Pro Tem Mihalkanin expressed his concern with design and rules of development and how these design standards will incentivize development. We have buildings that are fairly tall. What would stop a developer from buying one side of the square and that is now a lot of increased lot sizes. A large amount of buildings are being torn down and built with a new structure. Is there anything in the rules that would encourage that? In new designs we there is shopping, second floor is sometimes business, and higher floors are residential. In order to do this you are talking about increasing the square footage of these buildings. Mr. Winter noted that a mix of uses adds to the vitality of the area. The code permits a range of building types, including the mixed use building form and this is what we see most. There might be some places that emphasizes townhomes or apartments exclusively and that could be part of what we should talk about.

Mayor Hughson asked how are we going to maintain the historic look? If someone wants to build something we want to ensure that the block looks similar to the other blocks, consensus was to ensure the historic look continues. Mr. Winter responded that knowing this desire is helpful, and does relate more to articulation. Commissioner Gleason spoke on rear massing and the alleyways and concern as they are near residential areas. We need to ensure the rear side of buildings is attractive. Council and the Commission agreed that we want new buildings to look similar to the existing historic buildings.

Articulation - Existing guidelines are brief and do not provide visual examples on how to accomplish the expression types. The standards expand on the expression tools noted in the guidelines but are limited in how to articulate. Potential updates will expand on the existing list of expression tools and provide further examples in how to effectively and authentically articulate a building.

Commissioner Spell noted that there are no visual examples in the old code. Mr. Winter responded that visual examples were not part of the format of that code. Mr. Spell stated that at the recent Real Places conference, it was noted that when the planning documents include visual examples of what a community wants such as articulation, height variation, massing, and setbacks, there is a better understanding of the concepts. Mr. Winter noted that the new code allows for it and visual examples will be provided.

Council Member Derrick inquired about recent legislative action regarding regulation of building materials outside of the Downtown Historic District and that we still need design standards for anything that touches or abuts the historic district. Regardless of the type of material used, she would like to keep the decorative features included in the design standards as a preference.

Mr. Winter said he was glad this topic was raised as everyone is still looking at what the limits will be. What is shown as suggestions that address how materials are used for a final effect, not which materials will be used. Consensus of the Council and Commission is to ensure the historic look continues throughout downtown with use of articulation.

Building Materials

Mr. Winter said building materials are not currently addressed in the design guidelines. Design standards provide some information but focus on the “durable building material area,” not materials applied to the full building. Potential updates were mentioned and examples of what the community would like to see were shown and could be included in the final report, even if it is in an advisory section; if they can be regulated is still a question.

Mayor Hughson asked Mr. Aguirre, Assistant City Attorney, to review the recent legislation. He noted that in a Historic District, the city can still regulate the building materials by a Certificate of Appropriateness, however elsewhere in the City you cannot regulate them other than through building codes. Some municipalities incentivize builders to use certain materials.

Council Member Derrick noted that since still we have the ability to dictate what is used in our downtown area, she would like us to focus on what has been used downtown and have that codified rather than have them as design standards. We will need to have separate codes for historic downtown and another for sections that out as we move away from the historic square.

Commissioner Moore asked if are there any materials that we are trying de-incentivize? Mayor Hughson noted that there are some materials in use in our city that are not durable over time.

Commissioner Gleason said he is want to ensure out design standards are met, but any material used must be durable. It was noted that some materials that aren't as durable as others can be crafted to look like historic scoring and/or fine detail and therefore could be used in certain areas where durability is less

of an issue. Mr. Winter noted he could include this. Council and Commission consensus was to ensure that building materials are durable as possible and reflect San Marcos historical buildings.

Street Level Design - Mr. Winter noted that existing guidelines include elements of street level design, but do not address it specifically. The standards for street level activation provide for a level of transparency and they do limit the amount of blank wall. They reference the limited variations of articulation.

Potential Updates would include guidelines and standards that expand on current standards and provide further options for how to activate a street level including different surface treatments, creating a sense of scale, and providing visual interest, all of which is intended to promote pedestrian activity. It can apply to a garage or parking structure wall or an alley edge.

Mayor Hughson asked about newer standards, transparency, and storefronts that are all glass. Mr. Winter noted that traditional storefronts had a 12" or so base below the glass. To tie into design traditions we will need a base for the glass, even if it is a line on a full glass storefront that provides the concept of a base.

Mayor Pro Tem Mihalkanin noted that the building that previously housed the County Clerk Office (at the corner of W Hopkins and N Guadalupe) has a blank wall on the Hopkins side and only one street level exit. He suggests that type of design no longer be allowed.

Mayor Hughson asked what can be done on a blank wall? Mr. Winter noted the options on the slide that show display windows, display cases, canopies and awnings, wall art, planters and landscaping. Any of these can be used as a retrofit not on just new construction.

Commissioner Spell noted that awnings can create shade and it is important in summer especially when you are trying to promote walking. We need to promote shade from trees and awnings.

Commissioner Rand stated that open doors and accessibility are best, but she does like murals and does not want to limit an artist's design.

Commissioner Moore agrees with the comments about murals and awnings and would like deeper awnings and street trees, we are focusing on bottom floor retail but it may be better to have more residential units downtown.

Commissioner Gleason is not a fan of the long windows and we should have some type of textured siding on the building.

Commissioner Kelsey supports street level design. He notes the bottom floor of the former CVS building has the look of windows with some art. It is a good solution for an existing blank wall. This is exactly what we are stated we want.

Commissioner Gleason inquired that blank walls do allow some flexibility and sometimes there is some purpose for these such as utilities or air conditioning units so we need to ensure they are attractive.

Council and Commission provided consensus that we do not want blank walls if possible. Solutions when a blank wall is needed by the business (or already exists) that includes options of display windows, display cases, canopies and awnings, wall art, planters and landscaping. Also, consensus to not have any blank walls but also not full glass across the entire front. When glass is present, have a base. Awnings are desired as long as they are deep enough to provide shade, not just decorative

Transitions - Mr. Winter noted that the existing guidelines state where a neighborhood transition is needed, it is just stepping down the height of the building and we need more. Updated design guidelines and standards will expand on the current design guidelines information to explain how to effectively transition along sensitive edges and sensitive properties such as historic landmarks.

Council Member Derrick noted that The Vistas apartments is the best example of making their building fit into the edge of the historic area. While the height is large and massing is border line excessive, the breakup of the front wall with multiple recesses, the color scheme, the visible hipped roof and towers recall historic design of the 19th and 20th century structures surrounding it.

Council Member Baker noted that transition and height can give neighbors the sense that they are being spied upon so we need privacy/visual barriers in some cases such as trees. Mr. Winter noted some variables we can consider. One is stepping down the height and the distance from the sensitive edge. Landscaping can be helpful as a buffer. Regarding privacy, perhaps balconies/decks should not be allowed on some sides of tall buildings.

Mayor Pro Tem Mihalkanin inquired about transitional areas and how zoning can help identify what uses are appropriate for a transition area. Mayor

Hughson noted that much of this area is already zoned such that tall buildings are allowed.

Mr. Winter will look at what is permitted. He will look at this as being a design use instead of a land use issue.

Council Member Gonzales inquired about the Victory Gardens area off Guadalupe Street; he wants to make sure we protect these neighbors and have proper transition. Traffic impact is a concern in this area. Consensus by the Council and Commission is to look at transition areas and ensure we protect residential areas that are in and next to the developing downtown.

Discussion Questions:

#1 Are there any other design topics you would like to see addressed in this project? Are there any design topics that should be strengthened in this project?

Council Member Derrick asked Mr. Winter to look at our town and tell us what will bind us seamlessly to having this transition from the Approach, University Edge, to Downtown? What one design element would help connect these areas seamlessly? Mr. Winter will work on this.

Mayor Hughson noted simple things could be done to make a building fit in. On the Texas State campus, the Jackson Hall dormitory was a 12-story white box. A few years ago it was repainted beige and with brown stripes painted horizontally to make it look similar to the LBJ Student Center next door. Little things can make a big difference.

Council Member Baker noted the idea was mentioned of design excellence, that these are minimums in most things, but he would like a clear statement as to what design excellence means to us. What can we use as a city to incentivize those design standards. Look at corridors and how they may utilize massing and transition when going into downtown. Can we bring historical landmarks to life? Consensus by the Council and Commission is to have a statement that we seek overall historical in nature to some extent.

Commissioner Haverland is concerned about making such constrained guidelines that we would lose some flexibility in future development. Mayor said this can be addressed after we have the report and we refine the wording. Mr. Winter stated that we weren't specific enough in certain areas before, but this does not mean dictating standards down to the doorknobs.

Commissioner Moore stated that we made an attempt to simplify our code and is also concerned if we make too many barriers which may create challenges. People are seeking a slower way of life when people use to walk and bike and not have large structures with a number of cars. Would suggest more green infrastructure in our design standards.

Mayor Hughson stated we are not looking to create barriers but to define our standards. There was general consensus to include green infrastructure and sustainability.

Council Member Baker noted that the idea of design excellence has been mentioned. He asked if we could have a clear policy statement about the type of architecture we want, what design excellence means to us, and what can we do to incentive those standards? Also, looking at the corridors, how we can use the height scale and massing on the approach to and from the downtown areas and to highlight local historic landmarks? Mr. Winter acknowledged the statements. There was consensus by the Council and the Commission that we need an overarching statement of where we want to go with these design standards, that we want to pay tribute to our town, and emphasize what is already here.

Commissioner Spell noted that the design standards from 2012 were set to be very broad and very simple and the consequence is that it did not give enough direction about what we want to see. We now have new priorities. We need to be more specific in what we've already discussed.

Commissioner Haverland is concerned that we might have such constrained guidelines that we cannot be flexible in future development. We can address that when we receive the report. Mr. Winter stated that we have both design standards and designs guidelines. Standards are the baseline requirements and guidelines offer flexibility using alternative compliance that is already in the code. A basic project follows the standards. He's hearing that we need more restrictive standards as the baseline. Good intent statements and the vision statement will be placed into the guidelines that will allow for creative solutions which meet the intent which is a stronger sense of connection with the historic nature of downtown.

Commissioner Moore noted that we attempted to simplify our code and fears that creating so many barriers will take us back and have the opposite effect of what we wish to have. The sense of connection and historic downtown is good.

We are seeking a slower way of life with people walking and biking more and fewer cars and large parking garages. She suggests more green infrastructure in the standards including solar panels and pervious cover greenways.

Mayor Hughson said we are not creating barriers, but setting expectations. There was consensus by the Council and the Commission for sustainable, green components.

Council Member Baker inquired if we have a sense of the costs associated with different design expectations? His concern is the cost to business owners for the different options. Mr. Winter will consider this.

Commissioner Rand wants to ensure that street trees are also options for shade in terms of making it appealing to pedestrians. Mr. Winter stated that we are working on the design documents and streetscapes are already addressed in the code. We will be aware of this when working on building design. He noted that there are limits in the current code for forecourts which could work well along sidewalks.

#2 Would you propose any changes to the existing design context boundaries? Mayor Hughson noted the boundaries on the map for the Approach, Transit Oriented Development, Redidentail/Transition Edge, University Edge, which surround the Historic Downtown area.

Council Member Derrick stated that we need to have a hard edge at Moore Street with no commercial developments west of Moore Street. We also need to protect the Dunbar neighborhood from any businesses that would affect their quality of life.

Mayor Hughson noted that this should be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan update. Mayor said this workshop is for design context boundaries and asked staff if this would happen in another avenue. Ms Villalobos said these may be directed more towards zoning but it is pretty consistent with what is on the ground currently. Most of the area marked on the map for the design context boundaries is CD-5D and a bit of T4. After extensive discussion about modifying the edge boundaries and where those decisions should be made, the consensus was to leave the boundaries where they are. Some of that discussion may be held when the Comprehensive Plan is updated. Mr. Winter said he will look at design that would reflect the context of the area and the square.

#3 Within the design contexts, where would you consider focusing density and growth downtown? Council Member Derrick would like to see the bulk of

density on University Edge or at Approach. Executive housing downtown is preferred over student housing.

Commissioner Spell stated the University Edge is more appropriate for student housing or commercial that is related to student activity considering walkability. The Transit Oriented District might be useful for commercial development as compared to the Approach, Downtown, or Residential Edge.

Commissioner Rand wants to consider the area near bend in Edward Gary Street and towards the park because there are no single family homes. There are vacancies there that if renovated, could vitalize that area.

Commissioner Gleason likes the Transit Oriented Development corner and the part of CM Allen that is not residential is underutilized. The University Edge has least impact on historical structures.

Council Member Derrick pointed out that CM Allen is close to river so be careful about density and impervious cover there. The Consensus of the Council and Commission is more density at University Edge, Edward Gary/CM Allen (not the residential area).

Commissioner Haverland inquired about the Transit Oriented Development area and wants to ensure it remains transit-oriented. Mayor Hughson noted the proposed location for our central bus station is on Edward Gary Street next to Nelson Center.

#4 Where would you consider implementing a transition area (to residential neighborhoods) downtown? This has already been addressed in previous questions.

Mayor Hughson asked Mr. Winter if there was any other information he needed. Mr. Winter responded that he has many pages of notes and the direction he needs for the next step.

Ms. Villalobos asked if there were other questions or concerns. Council Member Derrick wants something like the Strand in Galveston or what The Winters Group did in Salt Lake City to keep the historical feel and we want it historic looking. Commissioner Moore stated that it is desirable that the area be walkable, bikeable, and historic. She would like nostalgic feeling places where we can slow down and be pedestrians again. The Council and Commission consensus was in enthusiastic agreement with Ms. Moore's statement.

Ms. Villalobos provided the next steps.

An interactive virtual community workshop: Thursday, July 23rd

- **Upcoming deliverables**
- **August: Outline for changes to the design standards and guidelines**
- **Fall 2020: Draft 1 of changes to design standards and guidelines**

III. Adjournment.

Mayor Hughson adjourned the Design Guidelines Workshop meeting on June 25, 2020 at 9:56 p.m.

Tammy K. Cook, Interim City Clerk

Jane Hughson, Mayor

Mark Gleason, Chair

ATTEST:

Cesy Burrell, Recording Secretary