



COUNCIL AGENDA: 03-16-04
ITEM:

Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND
CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Del D. Borgsdorf
Harry Mavrogenes

**SUBJECT: DOWNTOWN DESIGN
GUIDELINES**

DATE: March 3, 2004

COUNCIL DISTRICT: 3
SNI AREA: None

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a resolution approving the Downtown Design Guidelines.

BACKGROUND

Downtown Strategy Plan 2000

The proposed Downtown Strategy Plan 2000 establishes the framework for Downtown design guidelines. These guidelines define the design objectives that determine the look and feel of Downtown. The proposed Downtown Strategy Plan, along with other plans prepared for specific Downtown neighborhoods, was developed through the public process. The attached guidelines clarify the concepts of the Strategy Plan, translating it into an operational document that will reduce the uncertainty a developer and his architect face when preparing a concept for the development of a Downtown parcel.

Guideline Development Goals

The objective is to establish a common language between the City and the developer, providing guidance as to the City's expectations for the context, character and quality that will define San Jose, while inviting the creativity and design excellence that is the City's goal, which can only be provided by the designers. There is no one-design formula-fits-all solution. Striking a balance between guidance and creativity is an interactive process that is ultimately resolved project-by-project through an iterative process. This guideline document establishes performance standards to assure the quality of materials and architectural detail, rather than prescribing the use of specific materials.

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The guidelines do not attempt to dictate individual taste but rather attempt to convey the City's design objectives and the importance of context. Consequently, an ultramodern building is not precluded when adjacent to a classical designed structure. Both can exist side-by-side, provided they meet the test of objectives and context. The guidelines are intended to be taste neutral.

The guidelines are the result of reviewing similar documents from Seattle, Portland, Vancouver and San Diego. During the past three months, staff worked to balance goal setting with number driven text. These guidelines borrow from other cities, to use solutions for common themes facing urban core locations.

The Guidelines apply to the area of the Downtown Core that will be considered for rezoning to DC Districts. The italicized sections of the report are excerpts from the Design Guidelines of the Downtown Strategy 2000 Plan. These excerpts are the foundation for the detailed Guidelines.

ANALYSIS

Design Guidelines Structure

The proposed Downtown Design Guidelines are divided into three major sections: Site, Architecture and Streetwall. The Site section contains the standards applicable to all Downtown development. The Architecture section summarizes the highlights from the area Plans that have been prepared with the community and which capture the unique qualities of those Downtown districts or neighborhoods. The Streetwall section defines the connection of buildings to the street and pedestrian network, ensuring that new buildings add to the walkability and liveliness of Downtown.

Examples of the interlinking of design issues include building setbacks: limited or no setback requirements may have broad applicability throughout Downtown, but the setback requirements along the Guadalupe River are highly localized. Similarly, Downtown height limits are generally dictated by the FAA regulations, but are further restricted in the vicinity of the Historic Districts. There are guidelines that are very detailed and are applicable to all of Downtown, such as the public realm guidelines of the recently adopted Streetscape Master Plan.

Documents that contain detailed specifications that cannot be summarized are included as an appendix to the attached Guidelines. The Design Guidelines for development is grounded by the plans for the public realm, such as the Streetscape Master Plan. Maps are included to enable a prospective developer to locate a specific parcel and refer to the neighborhood plans that affect that parcel. These plans and guidelines include Market-Almaden Neighborhood Plan and the Downtown Historic District. For additional information, the various specific area design guidelines and other applicable design requirements will be posted on the City's website and included in a CD-ROM that will be available with the Downtown Design Guidelines.

Defining Character of San Jose

It is evident that there is no single design theme that will fit Downtown San Jose. Therefore, it is important to create guidelines that accommodate and encourage high quality design and architectural diversity. Downtown San Jose can be defined by a combination of:

- **Contextual Design Criteria** to maintain compatibility among buildings and take advantage of those visual features unique to San Jose;
- **Fundamental Quality Criteria**, translated into performance standards with emphasis on the types of materials that perform at the desired level of quality. These standards are applicable to the exterior quality and design of all of Downtown development, and;
- **Location-specific Design Guidelines** that further tailor the general guidelines in order to capture the uniqueness of Downtown's different neighborhoods.

Contextual Design Criteria

These design objectives are in the General Section and Appendix of this document and define the relationship among buildings. By focusing on what is happening around the building, the creative opportunities for the designer are greater. Typically, context deals with such issues as scale, relationships to the surrounding area, and transitions to dissimilar uses, such as from high-rise commercial to a single-family environment. Because the purpose is to protect the surrounding development, these criteria address the responsibilities a building has to its surroundings. This includes such factors as:

- Vistas that are unique to San Jose;
- Specific view corridors that need to be enhanced or protected for the community's identity and long term enjoyment;
- Street/building relationships that create inviting pedestrian and civic environments.
- Semi-public open spaces that provide balance to the built environment and transitions from outdoor to indoor;
- Roofscapes that define the skyline that forms first impressions;
- Building configurations appropriate for different densities, so as to create variety and interest in the urban environment.

Fundamental Quality Criteria

Fundamental Quality Criteria are found in the General Section of this document and represent the design guidelines' emphasis on:

- The use of quality materials to foster a sense of permanence and substance; and
- Exterior standards, such as base materials, finishes, window types, and fixtures.

Location-Specific Urban Design Guidelines

These are summarized in the Specific Areas section and incorporated into the Appendix of this document. Location-specific guidelines are those developed in collaboration with the neighborhood and community representatives. These are generally finer grain and distinguish one neighborhood from another. The design guidelines for the various neighborhoods often address issues in greater detail through documents such as the Guidelines for the Historic Districts, the Guadalupe River Park Master Plan, or the Market/Almaden Neighborhood Plan. Because they are the products of the outreach process, the design recommendations were not altered and, to the extent they have been adopted by the City Council, can be used in conjunction with the overall Downtown Design Guidelines. Location Specific Plans addressed by the Guidelines are:

- St. James Square Historic District
- SoFA District
- Downtown San Jose Historic District
- Guidelines that dictate design for Downtown's public realm, such as the Streetscape Master Plan
- Market-Almaden SNI Plan
- North San Pedro District
- Guadalupe River Park and Gardens

The combination of well-defined guidelines that make room for creativity, together with a professional and expedited review process, is the best opportunity to achieve design excellence, while providing a reasonable degree of certainty to the developer.

Public Comments

Comments on the Downtown Design Guidelines from the public have been generally favorable. Concerns have centered mainly on the relationship between the numerous other studies, policies, strategies and plans, specifically, how these guidelines will be administered with other conflicting documents, appropriate heights near historic structures, retail ground floor issues, and the design review process, in general.

The Planning Commission had no comments on the Draft Guidelines at their February 25, 2004 meeting. The Historic Landmarks Commission Development Subcommittee reviewed the draft and thought that having a very structured public review process that included architectural professionals would help to obtain quality sensitive designs in a timely manner. The final comments of the full Historic Landmarks Commission will be considered at their March 3rd meeting and will be forwarded as a supplemental memo to Council prior to the March 16th meeting.

Several local architects with offices downtown that work on major projects reviewed the guidelines and commented that the document focused properly on the goals for new development, presenting an appropriate balanced tone.

Administration

Staff will use the Downtown Zoning and Design Guidelines upon adoption to review all new development proposed in the Downtown Core. Where other documents exist, staff will refer to those documents for relevant area and site-specific information that furthers the implementation of these Guidelines. Where conflicts exist, staff will look to the General Plan, Strategy 2000 Plan, Zoning, and Downtown Design Guidelines as the hierarchy of policy direction. Topic specific documents such as the SNI plans, Specific Plans and Guidelines such as Historic or Guadalupe River Park and Gardens will also be used to ensure a complete review of the projects.

Staff will acknowledge any conflicting policy direction, if such exists, in the staff review and public outreach efforts to allow full disclosure of the policy direction staff proposes to implement.

The City Council adopted a Design Review Process for Downtown projects as a framework for staff review. That process will be used for the review of new development, incorporating the Public Outreach Policy to ensure adequate public participation, matched to the scale and scope of the respective development proposals.

Consistent with the objectives of the Downtown zoning code changes to provide an expeditious process, design review would be conducted by staff in accordance with the Guidelines. Because of the community-wide impact of high-rise structures that exceed FAR 6:1 and 150 feet in height, the proposed zoning ordinance recognizes that a greater degree of subjective scrutiny is appropriate. Accordingly, the action of the Planning Director on such projects can be appealed directly to the City Council rather than the Planning Commission.

These design guidelines do not replace or supersede building or zoning codes. Any references to standards for building or zoning are intended only as examples of suitable, but not exclusive, alternatives that would serve to implement the design guidelines. To determine the applicable code requirements with respect to building, zoning or land use, one should refer to the governing codes to determine development standards, use limitations, and other requirements and restrictions.

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PUBLIC OUTREACH

The Downtown Strategy 2000 Plan, which was prepared under the auspices of the Task Force for the Greater Downtown Strategy for Development was the result of an ongoing public process. The draft Guidelines were presented to the Planning Developer Roundtable, the Downtown Association, the Planning Commission, Historic Landmarks Commission Development Subcommittee and several downtown architects. Comments from these groups were presented in the analysis portion of this report. The draft Downtown Design Guidelines were available on the City web site including on a page created specifically for the Downtown Rezoning effort.

COORDINATION

This proposal is the result of a coordinated effort of the Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement and the San Jose Redevelopment Agency.

CEQA

San Jose 2020 General Plan EIR, Resolution #65459.

Del D. Borgsdorf
City Manager

Harry Mavrogenes
Interim Executive Director

Attachments
Draft Design Guidelines

Cc:
Planning Commission
Historic Landmarks Commission
Downtown Association
Chamber of Commerce
Preservation Action Council of San Jose