



Memorandum

TO: City Council

FROM: Mayor Ron Gonzales
Councilmember Chavez

SUBJECT: Downtown Design Review

DATE: June 25, 2004

Approved

Date

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the City Council approve the staff recommendation for Enhanced Downtown Design Review and associated actions and:

1. Direct the formation of a Formal Design Panel of three to five architectural and design professionals who possess expertise in urban planning, redevelopment involving historic buildings, and/or high-rise development.
2. Provide an additional threshold of “Non-conformance to historic design guidelines”

BACKGROUND

This form of design review would include a panel of local and outside the Bay Area members to review projects. The role of this panel would be to review, deliberate and provide direction to the project applicant and staff on how to balance City goals with project goals. Public meetings would occur in concurrence with the three-step review process outlined by Staff. The review panel would be responsible for ensuring that the best designs being considered in the other major west coast metropolitan areas are considered in San José. Members would be paid for their review services. The design review in Seattle generally occurs in this manner.

The panel would review projects that have the greatest potential impact to Downtown. Historic Resources play a crucial role in Downtown’s character and new development must be respectful of the existing environment. In addition to the thresholds currently proposed by staff, “non-conformance to historic design guidelines” should be a trigger for review by the panel. The Historic Landmark’s Commission review of projects has resulted in improving numerous proposals throughout Downtown, and the importance of our older resources warrants the additional review that would be performed by this panel.

The panel would not make project decisions, but rather recommendations to the Director of Planning. Subject to the determination of the Director of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement, this panel may or may not be a substitute for the expanded staff review wherein hiring third-party architects and urban designers would be initiated. The number of panelists could vary from project to project and would be at the discretion of the Planning Director. It is not

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anticipated that this body would “vote” on project elements but would provide a venue for discussion and input to the Planning Director.

It is further recommended that staff utilize existing technology options to transmit design documents to the panelists for review and input as a way of limiting the number of times an expert would be expected to travel to San José.