

Development Code Advisory Committee

June 4, 2014 Meeting Minutes

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 3:07 p.m. in the Planning & Development Services (PDS) Conference Room.

2. Roll Call

Members present: Brent Baker, Brian Cave, Keith Hickman, Jeff Seiler, Bo Spencer, and David Sour

Members absent: Chuck Glace

Staff present: PDS Director Brad Wiseman, City Attorney Steve Sheets, Planning Manager Susan Brennan, Senior Planners Joelle Jordan and Brad Dushkin, and Planning Technician Kerstin Harding

3. Approval of the May 21, 2014 meeting minutes

Motion by Brian Cave and Second by Bo Spencer to approve the minutes of the May 21, 2014 Development Code Advisory Committee meeting as presented.

Vote: Aye: Brent Baker, Brian Cave, Keith Hickman, Jeff Seiler, Bo Spencer, and David Sour.
Nay: None. The vote was 6-0.

4. Policy Discussion

Non-residential building design standards

Senior Planner Brad Dushkin outlined the department's concerns about the current design standards for non-residential buildings. Design standards were first introduced in the 2002 zoning ordinance, and have barely been updated since. There is concern that our standards have fallen behind those of the "benchmark cities" that PDS compares its ordinances to, and that it does not accommodate newer materials and architectural trends. There is a sense that the current standards allow, and may encourage, bland design.

Staff recommendations to remedy the problem are: 1) to increase minimum masonry requirement, and narrow the definition of "masonry" to no longer include fiber cement products and stucco; 2) broaden the range of permitted exterior materials to allow less traditional materials like metal paneling (currently the ordinance prohibits metal buildings); 3) require more articulation and entryway features with more specific requirements similar to the new downtown mixed-use districts; 4) update the language regarding massing and wall offsets; and 4) improve the language regarding alternate architectural themes, without accommodating corporate architecture. The Planning & Zoning Commission (P&Z) agrees that design standards should be improved.

- Mr. Cave asked what the purpose of the design standards is – he noted that most standards are to give a consistent look or style to an area. Round Rock has no specific "look," so what is the purpose? Ms. Brennan explained that it is mainly to ensure quality materials and prevent buildings from quickly becoming run down, but that they would like to improve design quality.

- As an example, Mr. Wiseman noted that the current design standards don't allow exposed tilt walls except in the industrial zoning districts – they must be clad in another material if in public view. He and Mr. Dushkin then noted that “public view” is not well defined in the current ordinance.
- Mr. Sour asked the members who are architects whether their clients would be receptive to requiring more features, even if it adds to the cost. Mr. Spencer replied that it depends entirely on the user. Industrial clients especially are looking for the most economical and efficient buildings, and some of the strip center developers plan to sell within 2 years, as soon as they reach 75% occupancy, and don't care if the building deteriorates afterward. Mr. Wiseman noted that several hotels seem rather bare.
- Mr. Baker asked about Property Owners Associations' (POAs) requirements, and when they have different standards. Mr. Wiseman explained that the City has no influence on the POA requirements; builders must meet both sets of standards.
- Mr. Hickman worried about overly strict standards driving development away. He noted that was a result seen in Pflugerville after that city adopted stringent new standards in a reaction to a Shell station that clashed with its historic downtown surroundings. He asked if anyone knew whether Georgetown's new, restrictive landscape standards had had a similar effect. Mr. Spencer noted that that is probably less of an issue now, because the surrounding communities have also adopted design standards.
- The group discussed several plain big-box stores and centers that were built 15-30 years ago and Ms. Brennan asked how the standards could best be improved, yet still avoid these very featureless buildings. Mr. Hickman and Mr. Spencer recalled that when the TG&Y and the movie theater at the Old Settlers exit were built people loved them because of the services they brought to the area. Both centers were cheaply built and have been remodeled since their original tenants moved on.
- Mr. Sour asked how the City had gotten the Wal-Mart at Red Bud and US 79 to build such an articulated and detailed façade. Ms. Brennan answered that it was Wal-Mart's initiative and that they did much more than the City asked. Mr. Hickman then pointed out that IKEA met none of those standards, with almost no façade articulation and an oversize sign. The inconsistency in enforcement is difficult to explain to his clients.
- Mr. Hickman noted that some great buildings have been made with humble materials, and that it is difficult to legislate good design. You could also follow the rules and still come out with something ugly. He gave an example of a poorly designed building that has a brick front to meet the City's masonry requirement, and now we are stuck with an ugly building that will last a long time. Mr. Wiseman asked what standards would make it better. He asked how the group felt about the new guidelines in the downtown mixed-use districts, or a point system similar to the landscape standards that were adopted a few years ago. Mr. Baker said that the point system had added more flexibility in meeting the landscape standards. He and Mr. Sour suggested emphasizing incentives.

Mr. Dushkin asked the group's opinion about proposed changes to the Chisholm Trail Overlay District. The overlay district was adopted so that new buildings in the historic area along Chisholm Trail Road would complement the historic pioneer buildings of the Round Rock's first settlement. However, Chisholm Trail is parallel and close to the frontage road, and the overlay district includes some properties that face both roads, or even only the frontage road. Some of the district standards seem out of place on an interstate frontage road, such as a 2-story height limit and some of the design standards. Staff suggests that lots oriented toward the freeway be exempt from the CT overlay design requirements and be allowed

up to 5 stories. As there are few if any vacant properties in the area, this would pretty much apply to redevelopment.

- Mr. Baker noted that there are several major transportation projects planned for the area, and cautioned against changing things before those plans are fully developed. He also noted that taller development along IH-35 might block the view from the interstate to the Chisholm Trail district.
- Mr. Hickman speculated about redevelopment possibilities for the area at the north end of Chisholm Trail and wondered whether increasing the height limit would create a canyon effect. He asked how tall the Old Town Square center is. [The building on the frontage road is 3 stories tall; the buildings facing Chisholm Trail are 1 and 2 stories.]
- Mr. Cave asked if the Bathing Beach project is still expected to go forward, and Mr. Wiseman answered that it is. Mr. Cave suggested that for the purpose of improving tourism, maybe it is preferable that even the frontage road side of the area should have a complimentary design, to indicate that there is something special about this area, and recommended against changing the current arrangement. Mr. Sour noted that this is a small area, and he was not sure that there would be much economic benefit to the City in increasing its development intensity. There are plenty of other locations to choose from.

Front/rear setback encroachment

Mr. Dushkin explained that there have been some concerns about the inflexibility of Round Rock's setback regulations for single-family and two-family properties. The City does not allow any encroachment into any setback by any building feature, including eaves or projections such as bay windows. Exceptions can only be obtained through an administrative adjustment, which is limited to 10% of the required setback, or by the Zoning Board of Adjustment. All of the benchmark cities that staff investigated allow some degree of setback encroachment.

Currently the front setback for the main house is 20 ft., and 25 ft. for the garage (or 15 ft. facing a side street). The rear setback for the house is 20 ft., or 5 ft. for an accessory building. Side setbacks are 5 ft., but as this is largely due to fire separation requirements, staff does not propose any changes. For the front and back, staff proposes allowing minor encroachments by architectural features such as bay windows (2 ft.), eaves or roof overhangs (3-4 ft.), and possibly patios and porches (up to 7 ft.).

- Mr. Hickman and Mr. Spencer did not see any problem with allowing encroachments for eaves and bay windows, but were hesitant about porches and felt they could impact a neighbor's view. They noted that porches are often later enclosed by the owners to create a new interior room. Mr. Wiseman noted that setbacks for sheds are only 5 ft. Mr. Baker speculated on the effect of reduced setbacks in communities like Sendero Springs, where all the houses are two-story and all the setbacks are minimal.
- Mr. Hickman said that he would love to put more porches on the fronts of houses, but that perhaps it would be better to reduce the setback in the back rather than the front, to allow room for the porch by moving the rest of the house back.
- Mr. Dushkin mentioned the possibility of allowing a sliding scale (using percentage of available setback) for front setback encroachment as opposed to a static number in response to concerns of allowing every home to have a porch/patio that reaches 7 feet into the front setback.

Parking ratios

Mr. Dushkin explained that recent projects have raised issues regarding the parking ratio requirement. The current standards do not include ratios for some of the uses that we are seeing now, some are out of date, and some need clarification. For example, when calculating the parking requirement for a hotel with a conference center, the standards currently add the required parking for the number of rooms to the required parking for the conference area – although most of the conference-goers will likely be staying at the hotel. Similarly, there are currently no standards for shopping centers under 100,000 sf., and the requirement is calculated by adding up the areas of the different uses (retail, restaurant, etc.), although the mix of tenants often changes. Staff would like to come up with something more straightforward, and the Planning & Zoning Commission agrees.

- Mr. Sour noted that most leases have limits on generating parking demand, in order to keep the other tenants happy.
- Mr. Seiler asked if the standards from the Institute of Transportation Engineers and Urban Land Institute gave enough guidance. Ms. Brennan and Mr. Wiseman said that staff consults their publications when setting the city standards, and adapt them to observed trends.
- Mr. Baker noted the difficulties caused by very popular restaurants, and that sometimes the need for additional parking is immediately obvious. Mr. Sour noted that sometimes the popularity of a restaurant fades with time. Mr. Hickman said that he advises his clients to build as much parking as they think their customers will need, even if more than they're required to, or their customers will go elsewhere. He felt it was more a business issue than a public safety issue. Mr. Wiseman agreed, and said that the City did not have parking maximums, although it does not want to encourage over-parking.
- Mr. Cave asked about the parking issues that were raised by the Fannin event center project in downtown. Mr. Dushkin and Mr. Wiseman outlined the basic issues, but said that conditions downtown are different because walking is easier and there is so much street parking.
- Mr. Sour, Mr. Hickman and Mr. Wiseman discussed some of the issues raised by call centers, which can often pack 10 employees in 1,000 sf. They also often use leased space, which was probably was not built anticipating that density. Mr. Sour recommended a ratio of at least 4 spaces for every 1,000 square feet.

General mixed-use zoning districts

Senior Planner Joelle Jordan introduced the discussion on mixed use zoning districts. Recently the City adopted three mixed-use districts specifically tailored to downtown, but has no mixed-use districts for use in other areas. Recent mixed-use proposals (La Frontera, Avery) have been accommodated with Planned Unit Developments (PUDs), which are time-consuming to write and difficult to update.

“Mixed-use” zoning is defined as that which allows multiple types of uses in one development, with significant physical and functional integration of project components. A common example is a building with ground floor retail and upper story residences, often referred to as “vertical mixed-use.” Staff proposes to also include a mix of uses in more than one building in a development, which is referred to as “horizontal mixed-use.” Conventional zoning districts aim to separate residential and non-residential uses with compatibility buffers and other features that have a tendency to reduce connectivity and encourage car-dependence. A mixed-use development allows diverse uses in one location, with site design standards that enhance the pedestrian experience. Mingling residential and non-residential uses enables more efficient land use, and is often particularly suited to infill redevelopment. In order to enhance the

pedestrian realm, design standards typically put a high value on varied and distinctive building design, high quality materials, wide sidewalks, and generous landscaping.

Staff proposes, and P&Z endorses, creating two mixed-use zoning districts. One district would be intended for small areas or individual lots as either infill or new development; the other district would be for larger, greenfield developments. The small area district would allow a mix of uses on the same site that would not otherwise be allowed (i.e. could include a residential component). This would be useful in areas ready for redevelopment, and would include design standards typical of an “urban” style development, with parking buffered from the street and different setbacks than for conventional commercial zoning. The larger area mixed-use zoning district would be for a mix of uses on the same site developed as a single, comprehensive development. Different uses could be mixed both “vertically” in the same building or “horizontally” in adjacent buildings. There would be specific design standards to make the area pedestrian-friendly and including substantial public open space. Especially if the area included only commercial uses, incentives would probably be necessary to encourage mixed-use zoning over conventional commercial zoning.

- Mr. Cave asked what areas staff proposes to rezone. Ms. Brennan replied that it would only be at the developer’s request, and indicated some potential sites on the General Plan Future Land Use Map that have been designated as suitable for mixed-use. Mr. Cave said that in his experience as a realtor, the type of people who like living in mixed-use areas are people who use public transit and like to be close to the action, which often means being close to Austin. Mr. Hickman noted that the Domain is very expensive, and like Round Rock, does not yet have transit access.
- Mr. Wiseman noted that having a mixed-use option for infill development could be attractive. Ms. Jordan commented that it is easier to accomplish on a small lot, but asked how they might incentivize the not-inexpensive pedestrian-friendly features in cases where there is no residential component. Ms. Brennan suggested density bonuses.
- Mr. Baker thought that the mixed-use option would be a good addition to the development tool kit. Mr. Hickman liked the concept, but said that the challenge is in the details. He asked if the benchmark cities had tried mixed-use districts. Ms. Jordan replied that many of them do, and that they are usually around transit centers, which Round Rock doesn’t have. Mr. Cave commented that many in the downtown neighborhood association like the idea of transit in their neighborhood, and Mr. Baker noted that the Bagdad Avenue site presents some potential for transit.

5. Discussion regarding any development issues in Round Rock

None of the Committee members offered additional development issues for discussion.

6. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:43 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

**Kerstin Harding
Planning Technician**