

**CITY OF REDMOND
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**
February 19, 2015

NOTE: These minutes are not a full transcription of the meeting. Tapes are available for public review in the Redmond Planning Department.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Scott Waggoner, Craig Krueger, Mike Nichols

EXCUSED ABSENCE: David Scott Meade, Joe Palmquist, Kevin Sutton

STAFF PRESENT: Steven Fischer, Manager

RECORDING SECRETARY: Susan Trapp with Lady of Letters, Inc.

The Design Review Board is appointed by the City Council to make decisions on design issues regarding site planning, building elevations, landscaping, lighting and signage. Decisions are based on the design criteria set forth in the Redmond Development Guide.

CALL TO ORDER

The Design Review Board meeting was called to order by Temporary Chair Scott Waggoner at 7:20 p.m.

COMMISSION DISCUSSION

Topic: Discussion of Consultant's Report on the Evaluation of Redmond's Design Standards

Staff Contact: Steven Fischer 425-556-2432 sfischer@redmond.gov

Mr. Fischer noted that staff has been working on an evaluation of Redmond's Design Standards since last summer. This is one piece of a two-part effort to rewrite the standards. The first portion is an evaluation and a comparison against other communities around the region and the country. Most communities considered in the evaluation are in the western United States and Canada, which seemed to fit the size of the Redmond community. The intent of this project is to go the City Council at a study session meeting on February 24th and have Council examine the principles established by staff and the outside consultant. Mr. Fischer would like the Council endorse and adopt those principles and direct staff to rewrite the principles as needed.

Mr. Fischer presented a document comparing Redmond with other communities, which was developed for City Council. He said that some parts of the design standards process are working well for the City, but some are not. Predictability versus flexibility has been a struggle for Redmond. Organization, use of graphics, site planning, and other items have also been a challenge. Redmond has been doing well with landscaping and transit, however. The report shows what Redmond needs to be working on in the future.

Mr. Krueger asked how the comparison cities were chosen. Mr. Fischer said the City was looking for communities with populations of 50,000-100,000 that have high-quality urban development projects and have made efforts toward sustainability and innovative design. Communities with older buildings that need to be renovated were also part of the comparison. The consultant, in working with other communities, was able to find some local comparison cities, but cities outside of the Puget Sound area were considered as well.

Mr. Waggoner asked how the grading process between cities was determined, with regard to which city was doing a good job and which city was not. Mr. Fischer said the grades were developed by the consultant based on their readings of the design standards of each community. Mr. Fischer showed the DRB a document listing the design principles. There are ten principles which have been developed by staff and the consultant. He wanted the DRB to discuss each principle and whether the pictures included helped illustrate what that principle is.

The ten principles are as follows:

1. Ensure new buildings are of a character and scale that is appropriate to the site and are of a form and size that reflect the human scale.
2. Encourage building variety while providing for designs that reflect the context of the site and that include some unifying elements of consistency within specific districts. (E.g.: Use of brick near historic core to create a more unified district.).
3. Activate the urban pedestrian environments by encouraging pedestrian friendly streetscapes and block fronts and by incorporating landscaping.
4. Encourage buildings with a variety of heights and interesting roof forms.
5. Ensure that new buildings enhance rather than detract from nearby or adjacent historic structures.
6. Encourage more public spaces (plazas or green spaces) in conjunction with new buildings.
7. Promote sustainable, innovative development projects that will provide long-term community benefits and have a high environmental and visual quality.
8. Encourage the use of high quality urban materials and integrated design details between floors one through three for new construction.
9. Encourage the use of distinctive design, rich northwest color palates, and long lasting materials.
10. Ensure that individual building elements and details are visually consistent with a building's overall architectural style.

Mr. Waggoner said some of these principles could be tied together. Specifically, Principle 4 and Principle 6 could be combined, in some way. He said there could be a way to eliminate a fixed maximum building height in certain zones and instead adding a requirement for open space. The open space requirement could include a bonus for extra height. Thus, building applicants would increase the open space around the City and create larger buildings, which could be a win-win. Mr. Krueger said that approach has been successful on some projects in Seattle. Mr. Fischer said there are some conflicts between that idea and Redmond's current Building Code. He noted that the community does not want super-tall buildings downtown. Also, there is amendment to the Building Code that allows five stories over one with wooden construction. Over that height, metal must be used, and that costs much more. Staff keeps hearing from developers that the market is not there to support that additional cost for additional floors. If the Council wanted to make a change like Mr. Waggoner is suggesting, the Zoning Code would have to be changed. Mr. Fischer noted that the current Code can lead to similar-looking, boxy buildings.

Mr. Krueger noted that with the old post office building project the DRB recently reviewed, there were other options considered with regard to extra height. Mr. Fischer noted that building was of steel construction, which is a rarity in Redmond. He said more rooftop open space would be good to see. Mr. Waggoner agreed, and said a bonus to developers could be given for creating open space in that way. Mr. Fischer said part of the problem with elevated open space has been dealing with building code. Getting people out of rooftop open spaces in the case of a fire usually directs evacuees through the building, which can be a problem. Mr. Nichols said finding some kind of relief in the Code in that regard could help with buildings of higher elevations. Mr. Fischer said staff is exploring that idea with the consultant. Mr. Waggoner said there could be a modulation to allow for five stories over three at the bottom, or something along those lines. Fire code considerations could be made for additional sprinkler coverage, possibly. He noted that assembly spaces and the codes surrounding them can be a challenge.

Mr. Krueger asked where modulation and massing were discussed in the principles. He said Principle 4 could be expanded to speak to how buildings are articulated. He noted that there were many mentions of windows in the principles, but he wanted a larger discussion about articulation. He asked about the staff comments and developer comments that went into this process. Mr. Fischer said staff has made several efforts to get comments from developers, architects, the public, the City Council, Planning Commission members, and DRB members. Meetings were held in Redmond and downtown Seattle to help craft the principles. A community meeting in Redmond helped produce input from local residents about design standards that work and do not work.

The group One Word met with staff to provide some feedback, as well. Mr. Fischer said, for example, Principle 8 brought up the idea of stepping the higher portion of buildings back and bit and using higher

quality materials. Developers are less interested in those ideas because they cost money in terms of having less real estate to work with. Mr. Krueger said the new Tiscareno building by Trader Joe's in Redmond will be an interesting study due to its live/work units and different design. He would like to see more mention of modulation and articulation in the principles.

Mr. Fischer said Seattle has done a great job on some of its taller buildings to bring focus to higher quality materials on the lower levels. One Word has pushed for that ethic of bringing the investment on different buildings down to the pedestrian level, up to about 16 feet high. Staff would like to see that quality go even higher, possibly to the second or third story. Mr. Nichols said the quality materials should be where pedestrians can see and understand them in the first few stories. He supported the idea of extending the use of quality materials beyond the first story. Mr. Krueger said the Central Park project has involved buildings being taken down, which now shows off many other buildings on the south side of Cleveland Street. He wanted to make sure the look of buildings was considered from a distance as well as up close by pedestrians.

Mr. Fischer said that when staff looks at a building, the context and impact a structure has on nearby buildings has not been considered that much in the past. He said this was a deficiency. He noted that the Seattle Design Review Board often calls for multiple designs for a project. Mr. Waggoner said that he has presented before the Seattle DRB, which often requires three options for one proposal. Impact on the surrounding area and nearby buildings is considered by that board as well. Mr. Krueger said the Redmond DRB has considered those types of ideas when reviewing the Group Health project and how it impacts streets and neighborhoods around it. He asked if these considerations about impact were part of the official Redmond process. Mr. Fischer said the idea to require three options might not be the best idea for Redmond, because developers often say building in Seattle is onerous and expensive. He said, however, improving on the process Redmond has now would be worth looking into. He wanted to make sure that applicants were looking beyond their own property lines and were able to explain their design considerations. Mr. Fischer recommended doing more in this regard than the City is doing now but perhaps not going as far as the Seattle.

Mr. Waggoner said Downtown Seattle is difficult to compare to Redmond, in some respects. He noted that when the exteriors of older buildings are renovated in Seattle, a DRB review is not always required. Mr. Waggoner said calling for more variety in development could be a good goal for Redmond. He said, in some cases, there is a lot of continuity in Redmond from one block to the next in terms of building design. He liked the design principles that call for design durability and variety, but talking about specific color palettes could shut off the creativity for developers. Mr. Fischer said he would like to stay out of the color discussion, but noted that the community would like to set some boundaries. For example, some people like the orange optometrist's building on 166th while others do not. It was built three or four years ago and has a projection cantilevered toward the street with modern lines. Mr. Nichols said allowing for variation in color was important, because if that variation was not allowed, a city may end up having no character. He called for a flexible color palette, but did not want a fluorescent purple color allowed, for example. Mr. Fischer agreed, and noted that the DRB has pushed the development community to use colors other than beige. Mr. Waggoner noted that there should be no mandate for earth tones or Northwest colors, but noted that using striking colors can make a building more difficult to sell.

Mr. Nichols asked about the Vision 5 building and pointed out that its finish is fading. He asked how the City could make sure a building maintains a high-quality appearance. He was concerned that other buildings in Redmond could deteriorate as well. Mr. Fischer said there was nothing in the Code that spoke to that issue. Mr. Krueger said that he had seen some similarly deteriorating buildings around the City. He said developers should be encouraged to maintain existing structures. Mr. Fischer said maintenance could be considered, possibly, with some new City guidelines.

Mr. Waggoner asked about the fifth design principle and how new buildings should enhance rather than detract from nearby or adjacent historic structures. He said this principle can take freedom away from developers. He said a modern-looking new building could almost set off the beauty of a historic structure in a positive way. Mr. Waggoner suggested instead that a new building near a historic building should have a development envelope that would be of a similar scale. Beyond that, he did not want to limit developers too much. Mr. Fischer said he was least concerned about this principle, as Kim Dietz in the

Planning Department is already working on revamping it. She held a workshop recently with developers to get new ideas about this.

Mr. Krueger noted that the language of the principle could stand as is, in that it speaks to the idea of enhancing historic buildings. He said there might be enough flexibility in the language to allow for different designs. Mr. Fischer said window or cornice designs can help modern buildings speak to historic buildings without copying them. Mr. Nichols said he liked all ten of the design principles, but said the photographs could be more representative of each principle. He would like staff to find more images to show the spirit of the principles.

Mr. Fischer showed the DRB a document outlining the overall evaluation of the City's design standards. Staff would like to consider economics in this discussion, as well. The fact that so many buildings in Redmond look the same is not necessarily an issue with the DRB, but rather an issue of current styles. Building codes and fire codes impact design. The value of the property affects design as well. Thus, staff has included a section on how economics can influence design. Mr. Fischer drew the DRB's attention to a section that talked about how cities "shall provide" for alternatives on all design standards. He noted that during his time, the DRB has never reached that point. He asked if the DRB wanted to write these standards in a very structured way or if the standards should be very open. Staff would not like to get very structured on every issue. He was unsure how much the Council would allow the DRB and the development community to influence the final decision on these topics.

Mr. Nichols asked if words like "shall" in City Code impacted staff in a negative way when it comes to evaluating applications. Mr. Fischer said that did indeed create problems. Mr. Fischer liked the idea of not restricting architects, but also noted that allowing too much flexibility can be problematic. Mr. Krueger said the word "shall" allows some protection for the City when it comes to projects that might be inappropriate. He believed that there was still some flexibility in the language for creativity, however. Mr. Fischer said it was difficult to determine where "shall" could be flexible in the Code.

Mr. Fischer noted that Boise, Redwood City, and other cities were compared in the evaluation. He said that staff will be taking the best ideas from all the cities considered. Summary recommendations have been included by the consultant. The document is 124 pages long, and Mr. Fischer asked the DRB to get acquainted with it over the next few weeks. He asked the DRB to forward their ideas to staff.

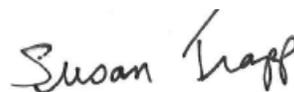
Mr. Nichols said it was interesting to see how other jurisdictions have managed design issues. He said there was a real opportunity for Redmond to see the good and bad ideas from other cities and make Redmond's Code better. Mr. Krueger said he liked seeing what standards were in place today and how the sections of the evaluation were laid out. He said this could be an overwhelming task to tackle, but taking the job in small pieces could be a way to get through it. He said the Council would need to focus on each section presented. Mr. Nichols said it would take some time to digest all this information. Mr. Waggoner liked having an outside perspective on Redmond's design standards and a comparison to cities of similar size. He noted that Boise was a more provincial place than Redmond, even though it is of a comparable size. He said Redmond was a lot more cosmopolitan, modern, and progressive than the cities it has been compared to in the evaluation. He talked about some other design issues in other cities, and noted that Boise, for example, appears to have a very predictable set of design standards.

ADJOURNMENT

IT WAS MOVED BY MR. NICHOLS AND SECONDED BY MR. KRUEGER TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 8:36 P.M. MOTION APPROVED (3-0).

March 19, 2015

MINUTES APPROVED ON



RECORDING SECRETARY