



DOWNTOWN BUILDINGS COMMITTEE MEETING
Thursday, August 20, 2015 – 6:00 P.M.
Neutra House
181 Hillview Avenue, Los Altos, California

DRAFT

MEETING MINUTES

Attendance

Committee members present: Thomas Barton, Anita Kay Enander, Deb Hope, Edward Infante, Pat Marriott, Susan Mensinger, Teresa Morris, Jane Reed, Denis Salmon, Nancy Nealon See (arr. 6:15 p.m.)

City Council: Megan Satterlee, Facilitator

City staff: Marcia Somers, City Manager; Jennifer Quinn, Economic Development Manager

Committee members absent: Hillary Frank

1. Approved minutes from August 12, 2015 meeting

Motion: Reed/Enander: Approve the August 12, 2015 meeting minutes. Passed 9-0-0

2. Received subcommittee reports

- Height; tower; setback; variances; public benefit (T. Barton, A. Enander, E. Infante, N. See)

Subcommittee report discussed.

Motion: Barton/Salmon: Approve final draft of subcommittee report. Passed 10-0-0

- Application of guidelines (D. Hope, P. Marriott, S. Mensinger, J. Reed)

Subcommittee report and Success Factors discussed.

Motion: Enander/Mensinger: Approve final draft of subcommittee report. Passed 10-0-0

Motion: Enander/Reed: Forward Success Factors to staff for review and comment. Passed 10-0-0

- Curb appeal (H. Frank, T. Morris; D. Salmon)

Subcommittee report discussed.

Motion: Enander/Infante: Approve final draft of quality of building materials with deletion of recommendation regarding materials, finishes and colors. Passed 10-0-0

Motion: Salmon/Morris: Approve final draft of landscaping with items 1, 2, 3 and 6 amended and item 5 deleted. Passed 10-0-0

Motion: Reed/Mensing: Approve final draft of daylight plane, as amended. 10-0-0

Motion: Reed/Enander: Direct subcommittee to soften approach to View section for final draft report. 10-0-0

3. Considered public engagement approaches for feedback on Committee recommendations

The Committee members concurred that the Planning and Transportation Commission and City Council meetings when the Committee recommendations will be discussed will provide sufficient opportunities for public input.

4. Review current meeting schedule and identify future agenda topics:

- September 17, 2015, 6:00 p.m. at Neutra House
- Future meetings to be determined

Meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

ACCESS TO VIEWS

VIEWS*

Observation: Los Altos has no zoning to protect the views of the surrounding hills and surrounding tree canopies.

Recommendation: Amend building guidelines to prevent blocking or obstructing current remaining views, of surrounding hills and tree canopy. This would apply to new and remodeled construction.

Recommendation: Provide definition and guidelines of which specific views to protect. For example. All signalized intersections. Views up South bound San Antonio Road as well as Edith, Main and State Streets.

Recommendation: Protect historical views such as those seen when standing and making a 360 degree turn at the corners of San Antonio, Main.

Recommendation: Follow the lead of such cities as Los Gatos and Woodside to provide concrete guidelines for all development that will encroach on these areas.

Recommendation: Be as clear as possible by using example language as used in Los Gatos Guidelines and Woodside Guidelines. Example: “**Views to the surrounding hills should be maintained** especially at signalized intersections.” (Los Gatos Commercial Guidelines, pg. 42, # 5A.1 <http://www.losgatosca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/325>)

Example: *SCENIC CORRIDORS.* (a) Lands visible (if currently visible, or if visible if existing vegetation was removed) from the driving surface of the following (state-designated) scenic highways: From Town of Woodside 153.221

*Note: See list of suggested views to protect.

| Observation | Objective | Recommendation | Committee Priority |
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| <i>Curb Appeal Subcommittee</i> | | | |
| Street trees are inconsistent in size and quality | Use trees that require little watering once established in order to conserve water, provide adequate shade and lush dense greenery | Trees along streets in the downtown area should have a height of 8' when planted and a canopy which is at least 15-25' in diameter 8-10 years after being planted. All trees should be properly watered and maintained to ensure proper growth and health of tree. | |
| | | All landscaping plans for commercial and residential projects in the downtown area must be reviewed and approved by the certified City of Los Altos Arborist. | |
| There are too many single trees and too much empty space, leaving the landscaping looking bare. | Create a denser landscaping in order to improve the aesthetics. | Implement companion plantings that will help fill in and hide the small tree trunks. | |
| | | Require trees to be planted along streets every 15-20'. | |
| There are buildings in the downtown corridor with setbacks that limit landscaping possibilities and create an uninviting environment. | All commercial and residential buildings in the downtown corridor must have a setback to accommodate landscaping guidelines for all types of projects/buildings for all the districts. | In addition to setback changes already recommended for CD/R3, consider adding a setback requirement in the CRS zone or other change to ensure space for plants. | |
| New projects in downtown have limited landscaping on walls and non-transparent surfaces. | To create a village feel it's important to cover large portions of bare wall landscaping as well as accent and enhance building entrances with landscaping. | Enforce current guidelines (section 3.1.2a) that recommend "use [of] abundant landscaping" for wall covering and storefront landscaping. When fully grown, the mass of storefront landscaping must be not less than 50% of the surface area of the non-transparent storefront. | |
| There is not enough low-level landscaping that is modern, native/indigenous and drought tolerant and that complement the current tree list. (This observation does not pertain to street trees.) | Use plants that have a more native/modern look and require little watering. | Encourage low water usage by creating suggested, but required, drought tolerant plant list. | |

| Observation | Objective | Recommendation | Committee Priority |
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| | | Encourage low water usage enforcing regular maintenance of landscaping. | |
| <p>No regulation or guideline was found that specifies acceptable, or prohibits any unacceptable, colors and textures of exterior finishes for buildings in the Downtown area. The current Submittal Requirements for design review require a Materials Board with color photos of exterior materials as well as a color rendering and 3D digital model. The colors and exterior materials which are approvable in the design review process are not limited by any specific prohibition or directive.</p> | <p>To ensure that the color and texture of exterior finishes for buildings in the Downtown area reflect an appropriate relationship with other buildings in the area, are consistent with the village character and are selected to coordinate with other architectural elements to minimize the appearance of height, bulk and mass.</p> | <p>The required findings be modified by adding the following: "Exterior materials, finishes and colors used serve to reduce perceived appearance of height, bulk and mass, and are harmonious with other structures in the immediate area and in the downtown village". The current required finding "D" should be amended to insert the word "high" immediately before "quality": Exterior materials and finishes convey high quality, integrity . . ."</p> <p>Adopt a requirement providing that proposed buildings in the Downtown district be modeled using 3D and other forms of simulation that reflect the Materials Board and allow for closer consideration of color and textures of exterior finishes in context. Submission of a physical Materials Board of sample colors, materials and finishes should also continue to be a requirement and included in the submission requirement checklist. Submission of larger scale samples and/or examples of uses of the materials and finishes in prior projects should be required for materials and finishes not in common use in the Downtown district.</p> | |

| Observation | Objective | Recommendation | Committee Priority |
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| <p>There are no guidelines in any of the zoning or downtown plans to address access to light/air/views in commercial areas. Daylight plane is only addressed for residential projects. Considering daylight plane is imperative when the goal is to create a warm, inviting and human scale experience in a residential and commercial area. Height, bulk and mass of buildings in the downtown area are the main factors impacting access to views, light plane and air.</p> | <p>Protect and preserve access to views, daylight plane and air in relationship to the development of the downtown and surrounding areas.</p> | <p>Impose a fee for those not meeting 100% of the lush and green requirements. The funds collected from this green fee would be used by the city to acquire and develop green spaces (i.e.. Parks, plazas, seating areas). Developers would be required to meet a minimum portion of the lush planting requirement.</p> | |
| <p>The current new heights and mass of buildings, in conjunction with the limitations of width and angle of the street creates a situation that creates a shadow effect. This shadow effect impacts the sidewalk and streets in front of, along the sides of and across from the new buildings.</p> | <p>To preserve and improve light for pedestrians, residents and nearby businesses. Also to preserve and contribute to the goal of providing a human scale feel to the downtown experience.</p> | <p>Find and consult an architect/expert/specialist that understands daylight plan, shadows and shade in commercial districts. The goal is to define the need for access to light and to understand how shade and shadow affect nearby sidewalk, streets, buildings, pedestrian and human scale.</p> | |
| <p>Los Altos has no zoning to protect the views of the surrounding hills and surrounding tree canopies.</p> | | <p>Amend building guidelines to prevent blocking or obstructing current remaining views, of surrounding hills and tree canopy. This would apply to new and remodeled construction.</p> | |

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| | | Provide definition and guidelines of which specific views to protect (e.g. all signalized intersections; views up southbound San Antonio Road, Edith, Main and State Streets). | |
| | | Protect historical views such as those seen when standing and making a 360 degree turn at the corners of San Antonio, Main. | |
| | | Follow the lead of such cities as Los Gatos and Woodside to provided concrete guidelines for all development that will encroach on these areas. | |
| | | Be as clear as possible by using example language as used in Los Gatos Guidelines and Woodside Guidelines. | |
| <i>Zoning and Guidelines Subcommittee</i> | | | |
| Height limits to 45 feet have undesirable, adverse impacts on village character, pedestrian activity, hillside views, light/shade, and human scale. | Keep all buildings in Downtown Los Altos at a maximum of three stories; eliminate narrow streets lined with 45 foot tall buildings; preserve hillside views. | Amend zoning regulations to limit height to 35 feet. | |
| | Provide stronger definitions; provide more examples of what to do; provide stronger tool for assessing projects. | Amend and supplement considerably the language and photographic examples in the Downtown Design Plan and Downtown Design Guidelines to provide better examples of desirable looks and articulations, including breaking up long walls with entries and architectural features. Delete photo of tower on page 68. | |
| | Allow staff to identify potential issues. | Amend "Submittal Requirements Commercial or Multi-family Design Review" to call out height exceptions on plan elevations. | |
| | Alert PTC and Council to exception requests. | Amend staff report cover sheet to indicate whether a proposal meets height limits and what exceptions are requested. | |

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| Some residents favor no further development or development not greater than 30 feet/two stories. | | | |
| First, Second and Third Streets are considerably narrower than Main St which exacerbates the impact of taller buildings on those streets, such as adverse shade projection and tunnel effects. | Reduce overall bulk and mass; create visual interest consistent with village character. | Require setbacks from lower floors for building heights above 22 feet or third floors. | |
| Under current guidelines, future development would substantially eliminate street-facing parking, bringing building fronts up to the lot-line with 2-foot setback and creating even more "tunnel" effect. | Establish sidewalk size consistency; improved visual appeal and pedestrian orientation; allow room for pedestrian traffic and amenities; enhance pedestrian safety | Amend zoning regulations to increase front setback from 2 feet to 5 feet. | |
| Compass orientation of First, Second, and Third Streets creates the potential for the greatest blocking of hillside views by taller buildings as viewed from the core village and major pedestrian walkways and roadways. | Limit overall building height to 45 feet; minimize size to that which is functionally necessary; reduce interference with skyline and hillside views. | Amend code sections 14.44.120 and 14.52.100 | |
| Current zoning language and guidelines are insufficient to define and limit height exceptions for parapets, chimneys, towers, skylights, penthouses, and screening walls. | | Amend code sections 14.66.240 and 14.02.070. | |
| | | Establish maximum height of 8 feet as measured from the highest point for all architectural features. | |
| | | Discourage use of architectural features that increase the perceived height and mass. | |

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| N/A | Reduce emphasis on height exceptions. | Remove language in the guidelines and plans that encourage towers. | |
| <i>Guidelines/Process & Procedures Subcommittee</i> | | | |
| Lack of coherence between multiple documents | Make commercial development smoother and more transparent for all | Provide detailed checklists at all stages of the planning process | |
| | | Plan for interactive online documentation | |
| | | Provide easy access to staff reports and building plans online | |
| | | Plan for future online submittals | |
| | Expedite the process by clearly defining community expectations | Clarify Design Guidelines; use more illustrations in all documents; | |
| | | Ensure consistent terminology | |
| Development a specific/master plan | | | |
| Lack of adherence by recent commercial development | Improve predictability | Communicate and enforce standards | |
| | Get quality development | Require architectural design review for every project | |