

CITY OF BOULDER
BOULDER DESIGN ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES
October 15, 2014
1739 Broadway, 401 Conference Room

A permanent set of these minutes and a tape recording (maintained for a period of seven years) are retained in Central Records (telephone: 303-441-3043). Minutes and streaming audio are also available on the web at: <http://www.bouldercolorado.gov/>

BDAB MEMBERS PRESENT:

David Biek
Jamison Brown
Fenno Hoffman, Chair
Michelle Lee
Bryan Bowen, Ex-officio Planning Board member

BDAB MEMBERS ABSENT:

Jeff Dawson

STAFF PRESENT:

Sam Assefa, Senior Urban Designer
Elaine McLaughlin, Senior Planner

1. Envision East Arapahoe Update and Request for Board Feedback

L. Ellis and **S. Assefa** presented the Envision East Arapahoe progress to BDAB and requested their feedback.

BOARD COMMENTS:

F. Hoffman and **J. Brown** recommended that the areas marked in gray on the map, also referred to as “business as usual” parcels, be included in the larger vision for the area. It is important to maintain a degree of flexibility. Be sensitive to current land owners but provide an inclusive environment so they feel welcome to participate in the plan at a future date. They also raised concerns about the nomenclature of “scenarios”. Consider a more nuanced approach for portraying them as a series of layers that convey different, interconnected aspects of a common problem.

F. Hoffman recommended that staff provide a larger scale map or diagram to show how this plan will fit into the larger context. He thought that the “Boulevardization” of Arapahoe Avenue will be paramount for the success of its redevelopment and accommodation of multiple uses. Neighbors currently find it overwhelming. Consider the metrics of slowing traffic; slower traffic, not the reduction of traffic, can increase the street’s throughput while improving connections and the quality of the area.

J. Brown cautioned that Arapahoe will likely continue to be a busy thoroughfare and uncomfortable pedestrian experience despite improvements. He discouraged residential and pedestrian-oriented commercial developments along the Arapahoe arterial roadway. Internal streets such as the proposed Walnut extension could become walkable neighborhood centers. He felt that the concepts could be bolder in nature; those presented seemed to be variations on a common theme as opposed to presenting different visions or ideas.

B. Bowen recommended that staff provide a visualization of Naropa at the corner of 63rd and Arapahoe to show that the entire corridor will not be flanked by mixed use typology.

M. Lee noted that 55th and Commerce scenario looked too finished. Assure that all images presented to the public are at a similar level of development so as to avoid provoking concern.

2. Design Excellence Discussion

Summary:

The board discussed Design Excellence with the goal of formulating a set of recommendations for design guidelines and procedural changes to improve development outcomes in the City of Boulder. Harvey Hine and Rick Epstein were invited to participate in the discussion.

Board Comments:

Process:

- The board discussed possible process-related root causes of some current development trends in Boulder.
 - There was general concern that many buildings in Boulder that have undergone a Site Review process are sub-par.
 - Members attributed poor design to the requirement that designs be subject to input from too many disparate parties: staff, BDAB, Planning Board, neighbors and Council; applicants are often given conflicting opinions resulting in disjointed and diluted designs.
 - There was speculation that good architects may not do their best work in Boulder because they are afraid of taking risks.
 - There was further speculation that developers may not hire good and more expensive architects for projects in Boulder because they fear that they will be required to pay too much in design fees given the long process and number of requests for redesign.

- There was consensus that the process is too unpredictable.
 - Developers must shoulder undue amounts of risk in delays, requests for redesign, related design fees, vague requirements for community benefit and seemingly subjective parameters for height variances.
 - Some members felt that these risks, coupled with the high costs incurred by community benefit requirements, make it difficult for smaller, local developers to work in Boulder. Instead national developers invest in Boulder for the return on investment over the long run; they cannot make profit in the short-term.

- Some members felt that the Planning Board requests too much community benefit from developers. Developers reduce the quality of design and materials to compensate for the cost of community benefit to make projects pencil out.
- Members felt that the amount of input solicited throughout the process from staff, boards and neighbors contributes to the lack of predictability in the process. They would like to find a means for giving more clear instruction to applicants and including different parties in appropriate areas of the project. There was general consensus that it is appropriate for neighbors to be involved in some of the higher level planning decisions, but not on the finer points of building design.
- The board discussed BDAB's role in the Design Review Process.
 - The initial goal of BDAB was to prevent poorly designed projects and to provide a conduit of communication between design professionals and the Planning Board. BDAB would help and provide a support system for architects coming before the Planning Board.
 - BDAB is tasked with reviewing architecture while Planning Board reviews bulk and mass. Some members felt that BDAB should also consider bulk and mass as they go hand in hand with architecture.
 - Some members felt that Planning Board should delegate the interpretation of design guidelines to BDAB to allow for more clarity and predictability. Send projects to BDAB immediately after Concept Review.

Site Review:

- Members generally agreed that there are too many triggers for Site Review. The associated costs and uncertainty for delay for some projects are disproportionate to the benefit gained by going through a Site Review.
- Clarify the Use Tables to allow for more by-right buildings.
- Baseline by-right buildings should protect the community from bad design.

Design Guidelines:

- There was a general discussion as to whether design guidelines are helpful or a hindrance. It is difficult to draft good guidelines that appropriately apply to all sites but they can provide much more predictability for applicants and outcomes. Consider a strong form-based code as an alternative.
- Design Guidelines should be a living document. Allow for modifications based on observed outcomes in completed buildings.
- Cities need background buildings and punctuation buildings. Some members felt that the current guidelines are written to make every building a punctuation building. Consider drafting two sets of guidelines and identifying appropriate sites for punctuation buildings.
- The board would prefer to see simpler, quieter buildings with a more restrained palette of materials. Include guidance in the design guidelines about detailing and transitions between materials.
- The Design Guidelines should reflect what the city wants. They are currently the least clear of the review criteria and allow for too much interpretation.
- Don't make height punitive.
- Define what type of urban form is desired in Boulder.

Next Steps:

- Each board member will bring a list of five basic things that “need to be done right” to the next meeting.
- The board will discuss the redlined version of the design guidelines at the next meeting.
- There was a recommendation to hold another joint Planning Board/BDAB meeting after Victor Dover’s visit in December.

DRAFT