

**To:** Landmarks Board

**From:** Ruth McHeyser, University Hill Moratorium Project Manager

**Subj:** Comments on the University Hill Commercial District Moratorium Project recommendation to consider National Register District designation for portions of the Hill Commercial District

**Date:** February 4, 2015

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## **Purpose and Questions for the Board**

The purpose of this agenda item is for Landmarks Board to comment on staff's recommendation— included as part of the overall recommendations for University Hill Commercial District Moratorium project—related to historic resources in the University Hill Commercial District. Specifically, staff is seeking feedback from the Board on the following questions:

1. Does the Board support the staff recommendation to consider National Register district designation for portions of the University Hill Commercial District?
2. If City Council supports staff's recommendation, what role should the Landmarks Board play in the next steps?
3. Do you have suggestions for the overall outreach and analysis process for considering National Register Historic District designation?

## **University Hill Commercial District Moratorium Project**

Background on the University Hill Commercial District Moratorium Project is provided in the [Planning Board memorandum](#). In brief:

*the project was initiated to address a specific concern that the current economic environment strongly favors student rental housing in the Hill commercial district, making it difficult for other more diverse uses to compete in the marketplace. Over-concentration of any single use in this small commercial district would conflict with the community's vision for the Hill, defined in the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan (BVCP) as "an activity center that serves a variety of commercial, entertainment, educational and civic functions," and "also serves as a neighborhood center for the surrounding area [and] drawing people from the entire city as well as the region."*

In August 2014, council passed a temporary moratorium on new residential uses in the BMS zoning district on the Hill to allow time to analyze and present options to address community concerns. The moratorium expires on March 18, 2015. The moratorium "hit the pause button," providing time to analyze whether this trend is likely to continue and to consider whether it is appropriate for student housing to dominate the area. The purpose of the moratorium is not to create a new vision for the Hill or to change the allowed density (i.e., maximum Floor Area Ratio of 1.85).

## **Potential Historic District**

The Hill has a rich history associated with the growth and development of the university, student life, and the political, social, and entertainment trends of different eras. Part of the area, particularly along 13<sup>th</sup> Street, retains the Hill's unique historic character, and is potentially eligible as a local and/ or

National Register Historic District. As part of the analysis of issues and potential strategies to address the issues, staff suggested considering National Register designation as a way to address concerns about improving the Hill's image, as well as property maintenance and upkeep. Historic District designation has the potential to highlight and celebrate the area's history and sense of place and attract heritage tourism. It would also make properties eligible for as much as 50% federal and state income tax credits for rehabilitation.

### **Staff recommendations on the Moratorium Project**

We are now in the final stages of the moratorium project and staff is recommending zoning changes and other strategies to address the findings listed on pages 14 and 15 of the Feb 5 [Planning Board memo](#). The primary issue that Planning Board will discuss is related to BMS zoning code changes; however, staff is also recommending a number of strategies to consider further including:

- A. Consider National Register Historic District designation, for portions of the Hill that are potentially eligible, allowing eligible properties to take advantage of up to 50% income tax credits.

This strategy addresses finding 4 e, federal and state income tax credits for rehabilitation can be used for everything from routine maintenance to major interior and/or exterior rehabilitation, and could provide the needed financial incentive for property owners to rehabilitate their buildings and improve the appearance of the area. Additionally, it could be a way to highlight and celebrate the rich history of the Hill, which could make the area more meaningful to new students and residents. It could promote heritage tourism. In conjunction with other strategies, it could also address finding 4c. It would require significant public outreach and education about the benefits and responsibilities associated with historic district designation, but National Register designation can be particularly attractive to property owners given that it is largely honorary and does not restrict property changes unless they are in association with the tax credits.

### **Next Steps**

The moratorium project schedule is as follows:

January 27	City Council study session
Feb 4	Landmarks Board comments
Feb 5	Planning Board public hearing and recommendation to City Council
Feb 11	University Hill Commercial and Management Commission (UHCAMC) public hearing and recommendation to city council
Feb 17	1 <sup>st</sup> reading of an ordinance for changes to zoning district standards
March 3	2 <sup>nd</sup> reading of an ordinance and public hearing on the overall project recommendations.
March 17 (if needed)	3 <sup>rd</sup> reading of an ordinance (if needed) and final Council decision.